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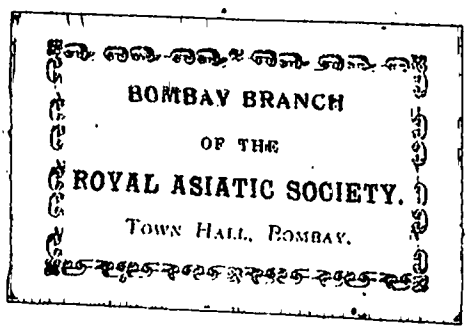

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AMENITIES

OF

LITERATURE,

CONSISTING OF

SKETCHES AND CHARACTERS OF ENGLISH LITERATURE.

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BY I. D'ISRAELI,

D.C.L. F.S.A.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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PREFACE.

A HISTORY of our vernacular literature has occupied my studies for many years. It was my design not to furnish an arid narrative of books or of authors, but following the steps of the human mind through the wide track of Time, to trace from their beginnings the rise, the progress, and the decline of public opinions, and to illustrate, as the objects presented themselves, the great incidents in our national annals.

In the progress of these researches many topics presented themselves, some of which, from their novelty and curiosity, courted investigation. Literary history, in this enlarged circuit, becomes not merely

a philological history of critical erudition, bu ascends into a philosophy of books, where thei subjects, their tendency, and their immediate o gradual influence over the people discover thei actual condition.

Authors are the creators or the creatures o opinion; the great form an epoch, the many reflec their age. With them the transient becomes perma- nent, the suppressed lies open, and they are the truest representatives of their nation for those very passions with which they are themselves infected The pen of the ready-writer transmits to us th public and the domestic story, and thus book become the intellectual history of a people. A authors are scattered through all the ranks o society, among the governors and the governed, an the objects of their pursuits are usually carried o by their own peculiar idiosyncracy, we are deep interested in the secret connexion of the inciden of their lives with their intellectual habits. In t development of that predisposition which is ev

working in characters of native force, all their felicities and their failures, and the fortunes which such men have shaped for themselves, and often for the world, we discover what is not found in biographical dictionaries, the history of the mind of the individual;—and this constitutes the psychology of genius.

In the midst of my studies I was arrested by the loss of sight; the papers in this collection are a portion of my projected history.

The title prefixed to this work has been adopted to connect it with its brothers, the "Curiosities of Literature," and "Miscellanies of Literature;" but though the form and manner bear a family resemblance, the subject has more unity of design.

The propriety of the title, I must confess, depends on the graciousness of my readers; the diversified literature in which I have so long indulged is of such late origin in this country, that the species has

never obtained a name. Blair entitles his work "Lectures on Rhetoric and *Belles Lettres*," and Goldsmith in his review of the modern literature of Europe, calls it "*polite learning*." The Italians have been more fortunate in describing this class, as *la letteratura amena*; and if it were required to place a classical seal on the term, we might appeal to Pliny, who has given it to literary pursuits in general, *amœnitates studiorum*.

These volumes are not addressed to learned antiquaries, to whose stores it is so difficult to add; I stand gratefully indebted to their labours, for though I have sometimes held a sickle in their harvest, I am oftener a gleaner in their fields: these volumes are designed for those of my contemporaries who amid the diversified acquisitions of this age in science and in art, some of which had no existence with the public in my youth, are still susceptible of inquiries so intimately connected with the progress of the human mind and of society, which should never be separated. Whoever imagin

that he may safely lay aside all the successive efforts of the English mind, as fashions out of date, contracts his faculties within his own day, and can form no adequate conception of that ample inheritance of the intellectual powers bequeathed to us from age to age. To be ignorant of all antiquity is a mutilation of the human mind; it is early associations and local circumstances which give a bent to the mind of a people from their infancy, and insensibly constitute the nationality of genius, separating the manners and feelings of neighbouring nations. Even the errors or singularities of our predecessors, the sagacious know, become so many accessions to their experimental knowledge; and in whatever is excellent, the impulses of our predecessors stand connected with our own. We but continue the chain of human sympathies, whose remotest link, be it ever so backward, supports what is now around us.

There is one more remark in which I must indulge: the author of the present work is denied the satis-

faction of reading a single line of it, yet he flatters himself that he shall not trespass on the indulgence he claims for any slight inadvertences. It has been confided to ONE whose eyes unceasingly pursue the volume for him who can no more read, and whose eager hand traces the thought ere it vanish in the thinking; but it is only a father who can conceive the affectionate patience of filial devotion.

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AMENITIES

OF

LITERATURE.

THE DRUIDICAL INSTITUTION.

ENGLAND, which has given models to Europe of the most masterly productions in every class of learning and every province of genius, so late as within the last three centuries was herself destitute of a national literature. Even enlightened Europe itself amid the revolving ages of time is but of yesterday.

How "that was performed in our tongue, which may be compared or preferred, either to insolent Greece or haughty Rome*," becomes a tale in the history of the human mind.

In the history of an insular race and in a site so peculiar as our own, a people whom the ocean severed from all nations, where are we to seek for

* Ben Jonson.

our ABORIGINES? A Welsh triad, and a Welsh is presumed to be a British, has commemorated an epoch when these mighty realms were a region of impenetrable forests and impassable morasses, and their sole tenants were wolves, bears, and beavers, and wild cattle. Who were the first human beings in this lone world?

Every people have had a fabulous age. Priests and poets invented, and traditionists expatiated; we discover gods who seem to have been men, or men who resemble gods; we read in the form of prose what had once been a poem; imaginations so wildly constructed, and afterwards as strangely allegorised, served as the milky food of the children of society, quieting their vague curiosity, and circumscribing the illimitable unknown. The earliest epoch of society is unapproachable to human inquiry. Greece, with all her ambiguous poetry, was called "the mendacious;" credulous Rome rested its faith on five centuries of legends; and our Albion dates from that unhistorical period when, as our earliest historian, the Monk of Monmouth, aiming at probability, affirms, "there were but a few giants in the land*," and these the more melancholy Gildas, to

* The existence of these *giants* was long historical, and their real origin was in the fourth verse of the fifth chapter of Genesis, which no commentator shall ever explain. AYLET SAMMES in his "Bri-

familiarise us with hell itself, accompanied by "a few devils." Every people however long acknowledged, with national pride, beings as fabulous, in those tutelary heroes who bore their own names.

The landing of Brutus with his fugitive Trojans on "the White Island," and here founding a "Troy-novant," was one of the results of the immortality of Homer, though it came reflected through his imitator Virgil, whose Latin in the mediæval ages was read when Greek was unknown. The landing of Æneas on the shores of Italy, and the pride of the Romans in their Trojan ancestry, as their flattering Epic sanctioned, every modern people, in their jealousy of antiquity, eagerly adopted, and claimed a lineal descent from some of this spurious progeny of Priam. The idle humour of the learned flattered the imaginations of their countrymen; and each, in his own land, raised up a fictitious personage who was declared to have left his name to the people. The excess of their patriotism

tannia Antiqua Illustrata, or the Antiquities of Ancient Britain derived from the Phœnicians," has particularly noticed "two teeth of a certain giant, of such a huge bigness, that two hundred such teeth as men now-a-days have might be cut out of them." Becanus and Camden had however observed, that "*the bones of sea-fish* had been taken for *giants' bones*;—but can it be rationally supposed that men ever entombed fishes?" triumphant in his arguments, exclaims Aylet Sammes. The revelations of geology had not yet been surmised, even by those who had discovered that giants were but sea-fish. So progressive is all human knowledge.

exposed their forgeries, while every pretended Trojan betrayed a Gothic name. France had its Francion, Ireland its Iberus, the Danes their Danus, and the Saxons their Saxo. The descent of Brutus into Britain is even tenderly touched by so late a writer as our CAMDEN; for while he abstains from affording us either denial or assent, he expends his costly erudition in furnishing every refutation which had been urged against the preposterous existence of these fabulous founders of every European people.

Such is the corruption of the earliest history, either to gratify the idle pride of a people, or to give completeness to inquiries extending beyond human knowledge. Even BUCHANAN, to gratify the ancestral vanity of his countrymen, has recorded the names of three hundred fabulous monarchs, and presents a nomenclature without an event; and in his classical latinity we must silently drop a thousand unhistorical years. Even HENRY and WHITAKER, in the gravity of English history, sketched the manners and the characteristics of an unchronicled generation from the fragmentary romances of Ossian.

Cæsar imagined that the inhabitants of the interior of Britain, a fiercer people than the dwellers on the coasts, were an indigenous race. But the philosophy of Cæsar did not exceed that of Horace and Ovid,

who conceived no other origin of man than *Mater Terra.* Man indeed was formed out of "the dust of the ground," but the divine spirit alone could have dictated the history of primeval man in the solitude of Eden. To Cæsar was not revealed that man was an oriental creature; that a single locality served as the cradle of the human race; and that the generations of man were the offspring of a single pair, when once "the whole earth was of one language and of one speech." "And there is no antiquity but this that can tell *any other beginning*," exclaims our honest VERSTEGAN, exulting in his Teutonic blood, while furnishing an extraordinary evidence of the retreat of Tuisco and his Teutons from the conspiracy against the skies*.

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* The miraculous event was perpetuated by the whole Teutonic people, "while it was fresh in their memories," as our honest Saxon asserts; hence to this day we in our Saxon *English*, and our Teutonic kinsmen and neighbours in their idiom, describe a confusion of idle talk by the term of *Babel*, now written from our harsh love of supernumerary consonants *Babble;* and any such workmen of Babel are still indicated as *Babblers.*—"*A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence*," 138, 4to. Antwerp, 1605.

The erudite Menage offers a memorable evidence of the precarious condition of Etymology when it connects things which have no other affinity than that which depends on *sounds.* See his *Dictionnaire Etymologique, ou Origines de la Langue Françoise*, ad verbum BABIL. Not satisfied with the usual authorities deduced from *Babel*, this verbal sage appeals to us English to demonstrate the natural con-

The dispersion of Babel, and, consequently, the diversity of languages, is the mysterious link which connects sacred and profane History. There is but a single point whence human nature begins—the universe has been populated by migrations. Wherever the human being is found, he has been transplanted; however varied in structure and dissimilar in dialect, the first inhabitants of every land were not born there: unlike plants and animals, which seem coeval with the region in which they are found, never removing from the soil they occupy. Thus the miracle of Holy Writ solves the enigmas of philosophical theories; of more than one Adam, of distinct stocks of mankind, and of the mechanism of language—vague conjectures and contested opinions! which have left us without even a conception how the human being is white, or tawny, or sable; or how the first letters of the alphabet are Aleph and Bêt, or Alpha and Beta, or A and B!

In tracing the origin of nations later speculators have therefore more discreetly, though not wanting in hardy conjectures or fanciful affinities, conducted people after people, from the mysterious fount of human existence

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nexion between *Babbling and Childishness*; for thus he has shrewdly opined "The English in this manner have *Babble* and *Baby!*"

After all the convulsion of lips at Babel, and confusion among the Etymologists, the word is Hebrew, which with a few more such are found in many languages.

in the Asian region. Through countless centuries they have followed the myriads who, propelling each other, took the right or the left as chance led them: vanished nations may have received names which they themselves might not have recognised. Kelt or Kimmerian, Scandinavian or Goth, Phœnician or Iberian, have been hurried to the Isles of Britain. Their tale is older, though less "divine," than the tale of Troy; and the difficulty remains to unravel the reality of the fabulous. The learned have rarely satisfied their consciences in arranging their dates in the confusion of unnoted time; nor in that other confusion of races, often mingling together under one common appellative, have they always agreed in assigning that ancient people who were the progenitors of the modern nation; and the Aborigines have been more than once described as "an ancient people whose name is unknown." In the pride of erudition, and the irascibility of confutation, they have involved themselves in interminable discussions, yet one might be seduced to adopt any hypothesis, for more or less each bears some ambiguous evidence, or some startling circumstance sufficient to rock the dreaming antiquary, and to kindle the bitter blood of pedantic patriots. The origin of the population of Europe and the first inhabitants of our British Isles has produced some antiquarian romances, often ingenious and amus-

ing, till the romancers turn out to be mere polemics, and give us angry words amid the most quaint fancies. This theme, still continued, becomes a cavern of antiquity, where many waving their torches, the light has sometimes fallen on an unperceived angle; but the scattered light has shown the depth and the darkness.

Among those shadows of time we grasp at one certainty. Whoever might be the first-comers to this solitary island, when we obtain any knowledge of the inhabitants, we are struck by their close resemblance to those tribes of savage life whom our navigators have discovered, and who are now found in almost a primitive state among that innumerable cluster of what has recently been designated the Polynesian Isles. The Aborigines of Britain took the same modes of existence and fell into similar customs. We discover their rude population divided into jealous tribes, in perpetual battle with one another; they lived in what Hobbes has called the *status belli*, with no notion of the *meum* and the *tuum;* in the same community of their women as was found in Otaheite*; and with the same igno-

* Julia, the empress of Severus, once in raillery remonstrated with a British female against this singular custom, which annulled every connubial tie. The British woman, whose observation had evidently been enlarged during her visit to Rome, retorted by her disdain of the more polished corruption of the greater nation. "We British women greatly differ from the Roman ladies, for we follow

rance of property, when its representative in some form was not yet invented. Our Aborigines resembled these races even in their personal appearance; a Polynesian chief has been drawn and coloured after the life, and the figure exhibits the perfect picture of an ancient Briton, almost naked, the body painted red; the British savage chose blue, and made deep incisions in the flesh to insert his indelible woad*. The fierce eye, and the bearded lip, with the long hair scattered to the waist, exhibit the Briton as he was seen by Cæsar, and, a century afterwards, as the British monarch Caractacus appeared before the emperor Claudius at Rome: his sole ornaments consisted of an iron collar, and an iron girdle; but as his naked majesty had his skin painted with figures of animals, however rudely, this was probably a

in public the men whom we esteem the most worthy, while the Roman women yield themselves secretly to the vilest of men."

Such was the noble sentiment which broke forth from a lady of savage education—it was, however, but a savage's view of social life. This female Briton had not felt how much remained of life which she had not taken into her view; when the attractions of her sex had ceased, and the season of flowers had passed, she was left without her connubial lord amid a progeny who had no father.

* This practice of savage races may have originated in a natural circumstance. The naked body by this slight covering is protected from the atmosphere, from insects, and other inconveniences to which the unclothed are exposed. But though it may not have been considered merely as personal finery, which seems sometimes to have been the case, it became a refinement of barbarism when they painted their bodies frightfully to look terrible to the enemy.

distinctive dress of British royalty. These Britons lived in thick woods, herding among circular huts of reed, as we find other tribes in this early state of society; and submissive to the absolute dominion of a priesthood of magicians, as we find even among the Esquimaux; and performing sanguinary rites similar to those of the ancient Mexicans: we are struck with the conviction that men in a parallel condition remain but uniform beings.

It seems a solecism in the intellectual history of man to discover among such a semi-barbarous people a government of sages, who, we are assured, "invented and taught such philosophy and other learning as were never read of nor heard of by any men before *." This paradoxical incident deepens in mystery when we are to be taught that the druidical institution of Britain was Pythagorean, or patriarchal, or Brahminical. The presumed encyclopedic knowledge which this order possessed, and the singular customs which they

* See Mr. Tate's twelve questions about the Druids, with Mr. Jones's answers; a learned Welsh scholar who commented on the ancient laws of his nation.—*Toland's History of the Druids.*

A later Welsh scholar affirms, "beyond all doubt there has been an era when science diffused a light among the Cymry—in a very early period of the world."—*Owen's Heroic Elegies of Llywarç Hen.* Preface, xxi.

This style is traditional and still kept up among Welsh and Irish scholars, who seem familiar with an antiquity beyond record.

practised, have afforded sufficient analogies and affinities to maintain the occult and remote origin of Druidism. Nor has this notion been the mere phantom of modern system-makers. It was a subject of inquiry among the ancients whether the Druids had received their singular art of teaching, by secret initiation, and the prohibition of all writing, with their doctrine of the pre-existence and transmigration of souls, from Pythagoras; or, whether this philosopher in his universal travels had not alighted among the Druids, and had passed through their initiation *? This discussion is not yet obsolete, and it may still offer all the gust of novelty. A Welsh antiquary, according to the spirit of Welsh antiquity, insists that the Druidical system of the Metempsychosis was conveyed to the Brahmins of India by a former emigration from Wales; but the reverse may have occurred, if we trust the elaborate researches which copiously would demonstrate that the Druids were a scion of the oriental family †. Every point of the Druidical history, from

* *Toland's History of the Druids* in his Miscellaneous Works, ii. 163.

† *The Celtic Druids, or an Attempt to show that the Druids were the Priests of Oriental Colonies, who emigrated from India.* By Godfrey Higgins, Esq. London, 1829.

This is a quarto volume abounding with recondite researches and many fancies. It is more repulsive, by the absurd abuse of "the

its mysterious antiquity, may terminate with reversing the proposition. A recent writer confidently intimated that the knowledge of Druidism must be searched for in the Talmudical writings; but another, in return, asserts that the Druids were older than the Jews.

Whence and when the British Druids transplanted themselves to this lone world amid the ocean, bringing with them all the wisdom of far-antiquity, to an uncivilised race, is one of those events in the history of man which no historian can write. It is evident that they long preserved what they had brought; since the Druids of Gaul were fain to resort to the Druids of Britain to renovate their instruction.

The Druids have left no record of themselves; they seem to have disdained an immortality separate from the existence of their order; but the shadow of their glory is reflected for ever in the verse of Lucan, and the prose of Cæsar. The poet imagined that if the knowledge of the gods was known to man, it had been alone revealed to these Priests of Britain. The narrative of the historian is comprehensive, but, with all the philosophical cast of his mind and the intensity of

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Christian priests who destroyed their (the Druids') influence, and unnerved the arms of their gallant followers." There are philosophical fanatics!

his curiosity, Cæsar was not a Druid *; and only a Druid could have written—had he dared!—on DRUIDHEACHT—a sacred, unspeakable word at which the people trembled in their veneration.

The British Druids constituted a sacred and a secret society, religious, political, and literary. In the rude mechanism of society in a state of pupillage, the first elements of government, however gross, or even puerile, were the levers to lift and to sustain the unhewn masses of the barbaric mind. Invested with all privileges and immunities, amid that transient omnipotence which man in his first feeble condition can confer, the wild children of society crouched together before those illusions which superstition so easily forges; but the supernatural dominion lay in the secret thoughts of the people; the marauder had not the daring to touch the open treasure as it lay in the consecrated grove; and a single word from a Druid for ever withered a human being, "cut down like grass." The loyalty of the land

* Cæsar was a keen observer of the Britons. He characterises the Kentish men, *Ex his omnibus longè sunt humanissimi*,—"Of all this people the Kentish are far the most humane." Cæsar describes the British boats to have the keel and masts of the lightest wood, and their bodies of wicker covered with leather; and the hero and sage was taught a lesson by the barbarians, for Cæsar made use of these in Spain to transport his soldiers,—a circumstance which Lucan has recorded. In the size and magnitude of Britain, confiding to the exaggerated accounts of the captives, he was mistaken; but he acknowledges, that many things he heard of, he had not himself observed.

was a religion of wonder and fear, and to dispute with a Druid was a state-crime.

They were a secret society, for whatever was taught was forbidden to be written; and not only their doctrines and their sciences were veiled in this sacred obscurity, but the laws which governed the community were also oral. For the people, the laws, probably, were impartially administered; for the Druids were not the people, and without their sympathies, these judges at least sided with no party. But if these sages, amid the conflicting interests of the multitude, seemed placed above the vicissitudes of humanity, their own more solitary passions were the stronger, violently compressed within a higher sphere: ambition, envy, and revenge, those curses of nobler minds, often broke their dreams. The election of an Arch-Druid was sometimes to be decided by a battle. Some have been chronicled by a surname which indicates a criminal. No king could act without a Druid by his side, for peace or war were on his lips; and whenever the order made common cause, woe to the kingdom*! It was a terrible hierarchy. The golden knife which pruned the mistletoe beneath the mystic oak, immolated the human victim.

The Druids were the common fathers of the British

* Toland's Hist. of the Druids, 56.

youth, for they were the sole educators; but the genius of the order admitted of no inept member. For the Acolyte unendowed with the faculty of study all initiation ceased; nature herself had refused this youth the glory of Druidism; but he was taught the love of his country. The Druidical lyre kindled patriotism through the land, and the land was saved—for the Druids!

The Druidical custom of unwritten instruction was ingeniously suggested by Cicero as designed to prevent their secret doctrines from being divulged to those unworthy or ill fitted to receive them, and to strengthen the memory of their votaries by its continued exercise; but we may suspect, that this barbarous custom of this most ancient sodality began at a period when they themselves neither read nor wrote, destitute of an alphabet of their own; for when the Druids had learned from the Greeks their characters, they adopted them in all their public and private affairs. We learn that the Druidical sciences were contained in twenty thousand verses, which were to prompt their perpetual memory. Such traditional science could not be very progressive; what was to be got by rote no disciple would care to consider obsolete, and a century might elapse without furnishing an additional couplet. The Druids, like some other institutions of antiquity, by not perpetuating their doctrines, or their secrets, in this primeval state

of theology and philosophy, by writing, have effectually concealed their own puerile simplicity. But the monuments of a people remain to perpetuate their character. We may judge of the genius or state of the Druidical arts and sciences by such objects. We are told that the Druids were so wholly devoted to nature that they prohibited the use of any tool in the construction of their rude works; all are unhewn masses, or heaps of stones; such are their cairns and cromleches and corneddes, and that wild architecture whose stones hang on one another, still frowning on the plains of Salisbury*. A circle of stones marked

* The origin of Stonehenge is as unknown as that of the Pyramids. As it is evident that those huge masses could not have been raised and fixed without the machinery of art, Mr. Owen, the Welsh antiquary, infers, that this building, if such it may be called, could not have been erected till that later period when the Druidical genius declined and submitted to Christianity, and the Druids were taught more skilful masonry in stone, though without mortar. It has been, however, considered, that those masses which have been ascribed to the necromancer Merlin, or the more ancient giants, might have been the work of the Britons themselves, who, without our knowledge of the mechanical powers in transporting or raising ponderous bodies, it is alleged, were men of mighty force and stature, whose co-operation might have done what would be difficult even to our mechanical science. The lances, helmets, and swords of these Britons show the vast size and strength of those who wore them. The native Americans, as those in Peru, unaided by the engines we apply to those purposes, have raised up such vast stones in building their temples as the architect of the present time would not perhaps hazard the attempt to remove. Essays by a Society at Exeter, 114.

the consecrated limits of the Druidical Tribunal; and in the midst a hillock heaped up for the occasion was the judgment-seat. Here, in the open air, in "the eye of light and the face of the sun," to use the Bardic style, the decrees were pronounced, and the Druids harangued the people. Such a scene was exhibited by the Hebrew Patriarchs, from whom some imagine these Druids descended; but whether or not the Celtic be of this origin we must not decide by any analogous manners or customs, because these are nearly similar, wherever we trace a primitive race—so uniform is nature, till art, infinitely various, conceals nature herself.

In the depth of antiquity, misty superstition and pristine tradition gave a false magnitude to the founders of human knowledge; and our own literary historians who have been over-curious about "the Genesis" of their antiquities, have inveigled us into the mystic groves of Druidism in all their cloudy obscurity. The "Antiquities of the University of Oxford" open with "the Originals of Learning in this nation;" and our antiquary discerns the first shadowings of the University of Oxford in "the universal knowledge" of the Druidical institution in "ethics, politics, civil law, divinity, and poetry." Such are the reveries of an antiquary.

BRITAIN AND THE BRITONS.

BRITAIN stood as the boundary of the universe, beyond which all was air and water—and long it was ere the trembling coasters were certain whether Britain was an island or a continent, a secret probably to the dispersed natives themselves. It was the triumphant fleet of Agricola, nearly a century after the descent of Cæsar, which, encircling it, proclaimed to the universe that Britain was an island. From that day Albion has lifted its white head embraced by the restless ocean, but often betrayed by that treacherous guardian, she became the possession of successive races.

Nations have derived their names from some accidental circumstance; some peculiarity marking their national character, or descriptive of the site of their country. The names of our island and of our islanders have exercised the inquiries, and too often the ingenuity, of our antiquarian etymologists. There are about half a hundred origins of the name of Britain; some absurd, many fanciful, all uncertain*. Our primitive ancestors distinguished themselves, in pride or

* See the opening of Speed's Chronicle.

simplicity, as *Brith* and *Brithon*; *Brith* signified stained, and *Brithon*, a stained man, according to Camden *. The predilection for colouring their bodies induced the civilised Romans to designate the people who were driven to the Caledonian forests as *Picts*, or a painted people.

That the native term of *Brith* or *Brithon*, by its curt harshness, would clash on the modulating ear of the Greek voyager, or the Latin poet, seems probable, for by them it was amplified. And thus we owe to sonorous antiquity the name now famous as their own, for BRITANNIA first appeared in their writings, bequeathed to us by the masters of the world as their legacy of glory.

To the knowledge of the Romans the island exceeded in magnitude all other islands; and they looked

* The historian of our land in the solemnity of his high office, unwilling that an obscure Welsh prince named *Prydain* should have left his immemorable name to this glorious realm, as a Welsh triad professes, was delighted to draw the national name out of the native tongue, appositely descriptive of the prevalent custom. But when, seduced by this syren of etymology, our grave Camden, to display the passion of a painted people for colours, collects a long list of ancient British names of polysyllabic elongation, and culls from each a single syllable which by its sound he conceives alludes to blue, or red, or yellow, our sage, in proving more than was requisite, has encumbered his cause and has thrown suspicion over the whole. The doom of the etymologist, so often duped by affinity of *sounds*, seems to have been that of our judicious Camden.

on this land with pride and anxiety, while they dignified Britain as the "Roman island." The Romans even personified the insular Genius with poetic conceptions. Britannia is represented as a female seated on a rock, armed with a spear, or leaning on a prow, while the ship beside her attests her naval power. We may yet be susceptible of the prophetic flattery, when we observe the Roman has also seated her on a globe, with the symbol of military power, and the ocean rolling under her feet *.

The tale of these ancient Britons who should have been our ancestors is told by the philosophical historian of antiquity. Under successive Roman governors they still remained divided by native factions: "A circumstance," observes Tacitus, "most useful for us, among such a powerful people, where each combating singly, all are subdued." A century, as we have said, had not elapsed from the landing of Cæsar to the administration of Agricola. That enlightened general changed the policy of former governors; he allured the Britons from their forest-retreats and reedy roofs to partake of the pleasures of a Roman city—to dwell in houses, to erect lofty temples, and to indulge in dissolving baths. The barbarian who had scorned the

* Evelyn's Numismata. Pinkerton has engraven ten of these Britannias struck by the Romans in his "Essay on Medals."

Roman tongue now felt the ambition of Roman eloquence; and the painted Briton of Cæsar was enveloped in the Roman toga. Severus, in another century after Agricola, as an extraordinary evidence of his successful government, appealed to Britain—"Even the Britons are quiet!" exclaimed the emperor. The tutelary genius of Rome through four centuries preserved Britain—even from the Britons themselves; but the Roman policy was fatal to the national character, and when the day arrived that their protector forsook them, the Britons were left among their ancient discords: for provincial jealousies, however concealed by circumstances, are never suppressed; the fire lives in its embers ready to be kindled.

The island of Britain, itself not extensive, was broken into petty principalities: we are told that there were nearly two hundred kinglings, the greater part of whom did not presume to wear crowns. Sometimes they united in their jealousies of some paramount tyrant; but they raged among themselves; and the passion of Gildas has figured them as "the Lioness of Devonshire" encountering a "Lion's Whelp" in Dorsetshire, and "the Bear-Baiter," trembling before his regal brother, "the Great Bull-dog." "These kings were not appointed by God," exclaims the British Jeremiah; he who wrote under the name of Gildas.

Thus, the Britons formed a powerless aggregate, and never a nation. The naked Irish haunted their shores, covering their sea with piracy; and the Picts rushed from their forests—giants of the North who, if Gildas does not exaggerate, even dragged down from their walls the amazed Britons. Such a people in their terrified councils were to be suppliants to the valour of foreigners; from that hour they were doomed to be chased from their natal soil. They invited, or they encouraged, another race to become their mercenaries or their allies. The small and the great from other shores hastened to a new dominion. Britain then became "a field of fortune to every adventurer when nothing less than kingdoms were the prize of every fortunate commander *."

We have now the history of a people whose enemies inhabited their ancient land: the flame and the sword ceaselessly devouring the soil; their dominion shrinking in space and the people diminishing in number; victory for them was fatal as defeat. The disasters of the Britons pursued them through the despair of almost two centuries; it would have been the history of a whole people ever retreating, yet hardly in flight, had it been written. Shall we refuse on the score of their disputed antiquity the evidence of the Welsh bards? The wild

* Milton.

grandeur of the melancholy poetry of those ancient Britons attests the reality of their story and the depth of their emotions*.

We have spun the last thread of our cobweb, and we know not on what points it hangs, such irreconcileable hypotheses are offered to us by our learned antiquaries, whenever they would account for the origin or the disappearance of a whole people. The mystery deepens and the confusion darkens amid contradictions and incredibilities, when the British historian contemplates in the perspective the Fata Morgana of another Britain on the opposite shores of the ancient Armorica, another Britain in La Brétagne.

The ancient Armorica was a district extending from the Loire to the Seine, about sixty leagues, and except on the land-side, which joined Poictou, is encircled by the ocean. Composed of several small states, in the decline of the Roman empire they shook off the Roman yoke, and their independence was secured by the obscurity of their sequestered locality.

The tale runs, that Maximus having engaged his provincial Britons in his ambitious schemes, rewarded their military aid by planting them in one of these Armorican communities. To give colour to this tradi-

* See Mr. Turner's able Vindication of the Genuineness of the Ancient British Bards.

tion the story adds, that this Roman general had a considerable interest in Wales, "having married the daughter of a powerful chieftain, whose chapel at Carnarvon is still shown*." The marriage of this future Roman emperor with a Welsh princess would serve as an embellishment to a Welsh genealogy. This event must have occurred about the year 384. When the Britons were driven out of their country by faithless allies, Armorica would offer an easy refuge for fugitives; there they found brothers already settled, or friends willing to receive them†.

* Warton draws his knowledge from Rowland's *Mona Antiqua*; Geoffry of Monmouth would have extended his inquiry. Camden, judicious as he was, has actually bestowed the kingdom, as well as the princess, on this Roman general; and Gibbon has sarcastically noticed that Camden has been authority for all "his blind followers." The source of this sort of history lies in the volume of the Monk of Monmouth, where Gibbon might have found the number of the numerous army of Maximus. Rowland's Mona Antiqua Restaurata is one of the most extraordinary pieces of our British Antiquities. It is written with the embrowned rust of our old English Antiquaries, where nothing on a subject seems to be omitted; but our author, unlike his contemporary antiquaries, is sceptical even on his own acquisitions; he asserts little and assumes nothing. One may conceive the native simplicity of an author, who having to describe the Isle of Anglesey, opens his work with the history of Chaos itself, to explain by the division of land and water the origin of islands. I have heard that this learned antiquary never travelled from his native island.

† L'Art de vérifier les Dates, article *Brétagne*, is thrown into utter confusion. It seems, however, to indicate that there were many migrations; but all is indistinct or uncertain.

In this uncertainty of history amid the dreams of theoretical antiquaries, we cannot doubt that at some time there was a powerful colony of Britons in Armorica; they acquired dominion as well as territory. They changed that masterless Armorican state to which they were transplanted from an aristocracy into a monarchy, that government to which they had been accustomed; they consecrated the strange land by the baptism of their own national name, and to this day it is called Brétagne, or Britain; and surely the Britons carried with them all their home-affections, for they made the new country an image of the old: not only had they stamped on it the British name, but the Britons of Cornwall called a considerable district by their own provincial name, known in France as "le Pays de Cornouaille;" and their speech perpetuated their vernacular Celtic. At the siege of Belleisle in 1756, the honest Britons of the principality among our soldiers were amazed to find that they and the peasants of Brittany were capable of conversing together. This expatriation reminds us of the emotions of the first settlers in the New World. Ancient Spain reflected herself in her New Spain; and our first emigrants called their "plantations" "New England;" distributing local names borrowed from the land of their birth—undying memorials of their parent source!

This singular event in the civil annals of the ancient Britons has given rise to a circumstance unparalleled in the literary history of every people, for it has often involved in a mysterious confusion a part of our literary and historical antiquities. The Britain in France is not always discriminated from our own; and this double Britain at times becomes provokingly mystifying. Two eminent antiquaries, Douce and Ritson, sometimes conceived that Brétagne meant England; a circumstance which might upset a whole hypothesis.

In the fastnesses of Wales, on the heights of Caledonia, and on the friendly land of Armorica, are yet tracked the fugitive and ruined Britons. It is most generally conceded, that they retreated to the western coasts of England, and that often discomfited they took their last refuge in those "mountain heights" of Cambria.

Their shadowy Arthur has left an undying name in romance, and is a nonentity in history. Whether Arthur was a mortal commander heading some kings of Britain, or whether religion and policy were driven to the desperate effort for rallying their fugitives by a national name, and "a hope deferred," like the Sebastian of Portugal, this far-famed chieftain could never have been a fortunate general; he displayed his invincibility but in some obscure and remote locality; he

struck no terror among his enemies, for they have left his name unchronicled; nor living, have the bards distinguished his pre-eminence. "The grave of Arthur is a mystery of the world," exclaimed Taliessin, the great bard of the Britons. But the mortal who vanished in the cloud of conflict had never seen death; and to the last the Britons awaited for the day of their Redeemer when Arthur should return in his immortality, accompanied by "the Flood-King of the Deluge," from the Inys Avallon, the Isle of the Mystic Apple-tree, their Eden or their Elysium. Arthur was a myth half-Christian and half druidical. In Armorica as in Wales, his coming was long expected, till "Espérance bretonne" became proverbial for all chimerical hopes.

Thus, the Aborigines of this island vanished, but their name is still attached to us. The Anglo-Saxons became our progenitors, and the Saxon our mother-tongue. Yet so complex and incongruous is the course of time, that we still call ourselves Britons, and "true Britons;" and the land we dwell in, Great Britain. Nor is it less remarkable, that the days of the Christian week commemorate the names of seven Saxon idols*. There are improbabilities and incongruities in authentic

* Verstegan has finely engraved these idols in his "Restitution," so delighted was this Teutonic Christian with these hideous absurdities of his pagan ancestors, and so proud of his Saxon descent.

history, as hard to reconcile as any we meet with in wild romance.

During six centuries the Saxons and the Normans combined to banish from the public mind the history of the Britons: it was lost; it did not exist even among the Britons in Wales. In the reign of Henry the First, an Archdeacon of Oxford, who was that King's justiciary, being curious in ancient histories, opportunely brought out of "Britain in France," "a very ancient book in the British tongue." This book, which still forms the gordian knot of the antiquary, he confided to the safe custody and fertile genius of Geoffry, the Monk of Monmouth. It contained a regular story of the British kings, opening with Brute, the great grandson of Priam in this airy generation; kings who, Geoffry "had often wondered, were wholly unnoticed by Gildas and Bede." "Yet," adds our historian, "their deeds were celebrated by many people in a *pleasant manner*, and *by heart, as if they had been written.*" This remarkable sentence aptly describes that species of national songs which the early poets have always provided for the people, traditions which float before history is written. Whether this very ancient British book, almost five centuries old, was a volume of these poetical legends, which our historian might have arranged into that "regular history" which is furnished by his Latin prose version, we are

left without the means of ascertaining, since it proved to be the only copy ever found, and was never seen after the day of the translation. The Monk of Monmouth does not arrogate to himself any other merit than that of a faithful translator, and with honest simplicity warns of certain additions, which, even in a history of two thousand years contained in a small volume, were found necessary.

We are told that the Britons who passed over into France carried with them "their archives." But there were other Britons who did not fly to the sixty leagues of Armorica; and of these the only "archives" we hear of are those which the romancers so perpetually assure us may be consulted at Caerleon, or some other magical residence of the visionary Arthur. The Armorican colony must have formed but a portion of the Britons; and it would be unreasonable to suppose, that these fugitives could by any human means sequestrate and appropriate for themselves the whole history of the nation, without leaving a fragment behind. Yet nothing resembling the Armorican originals has been traced among the Welsh. Our Geoffry modestly congratulates his contemporary annalists, while he warns them off the preserve where lies his own well-stocked game. And thus he speaks:—"The history of the kings who were the successors in Wales of those here recorded, I leave

to Karadoc of Lancarven, as I do also the kings of the Saxons to William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon; but I advise them to be silent concerning the British kings, since they have not that book written in the British tongue which Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford, brought out of Britain." Well might Geoffry exult. He possessed the sole copy ever found in both the Britains.

The British history is left to speak for itself in a great simplicity of narrative, where even the supernatural offers no obstacle to the faith of the historian, a history which might fascinate a child as well as an antiquary. These remote occurrences are substantiated by the careful dates of a romantic chronology. Events are recorded which happened when David reigned in Judea, and Sylvius Latinus in Italy, and Gad, Nathan, and Asaph prophesied in Israel. And the incidents of Lear's pathetic story occurred when Isaiah and Hosea flourished, and Rome was built by the two brothers. It tells of one of the British monarchs, how the lady of his love was concealed during seven years in a subterraneous palace. On his death, his avengeful queen cast the mother and her daughter into the river which still bears that daughter's name, Sabrina, or the Severn, and was not forgotten by Drayton. Another incident adorns a canto of Spenser; the Lear came down to Shakspeare,

as the fraternal feuds of Ferrex and Porrex created our first tragedy by Sackville. There are other tales which by their complexion betray their legendary origin.

Whatever assumed the form of history was long deemed authentic; and such was the authority of this romance of Geoffry, that when Edward the First claimed the crown of Scotland in his letter to the pope, he founded his right on a passage in Geoffry's book: doubtless this very passage was held to be as veracious by the Scots themselves, only that on this occasion they decided to fight against the text. Four centuries after Geoffry had written, when Henry the Seventh appointed a commission to draw up his pedigree, they traced the royal descent from the imaginary Brutus, and reckoning all Geoffry's British kings in the line—the fairies of history—made the English monarch a descendant in the hundredth degree. We now often hear of "the fabulous" History of Geoffry of Monmouth; but neither his learned translator in 1718, nor the most eminent Welsh antiquaries, attach any such notion to a history crowded with domestic events, and with names famous yet unknown.

After the lapse of so many centuries, the scrutinising investigation of a thoughtful explorer in British antiquities has demonstrated, through a chain of recondite circumstances, that this History of Geoffry of Mon-

mouth, and its immediate predecessor, the celebrated Chronicle of the pseudo-Archbishop Turpin, were sent forth on the same principle on which to this day we publish party pamphlets, to influence the spirit of two great nations opposed in interest and glory to each other; in a word, that they were two Tales of a Tub thrown out to busy those mighty whales, France and England *.

One great result of their successful grasp of the popular feelings could never have been contemplated by these grave forgers of fabulous history. The Chronicle of Archbishop Turpin and the British History of Geoffry of Monmouth became the parents of those two rival families of romances, which commemorate the deeds of the Paladins of Charlemagne, and the Knights of Arthur, the delight of three centuries.

The Welsh of this day possess very ancient manuscripts which they cherish as the remains of the ancient Britons. These preserve the deep strains of poets composed in triumph or in defeat, the poetry of a melancholy race. Gray first attuned the Cymry harp to British notes, more poetical than the poems themselves, while others have devoted their pens to translation, unhappily not always master of the language of their version. These manuscripts

* Turner's History of England during the Middle Ages, iv. 326.

contain also a remarkable body of fiction in the MABINOGION, or juvenile amusements, a collection of prose tales combining the marvellous and the imaginative. Some are chivalric and amatory, stamped with the manners and customs of the middle ages; others apparently of a much higher antiquity, like all such national remains, are considered mythological; some there are not well adapted, perhaps, to the initiation of youth. Obviously they are nothing more than short romances; but we are solemnly assured that the Mabinogion abound with occult mysteries, and that simple fiction only served to allure the British neophyte to bardic mysticism. A learned writer, who is apt to view old things in a new light, and whose boldness invigorates the creeping toil of the antiquary, reveals the esoteric doctrine—"the childhood alluded to in their title is an early and preparatory stage of initiation; they were calculated to inflame curiosity, to exercise ingenuity, and lead the aspirant gradually into a state of preparation for things which ears not long and carefully disciplined were unfit to hear*."

* "Britannia after the Romans." The literary patriotism of Wales has been more remarkable among humble individuals than among the squirearchy, if we except the ardent Pennant. Mr. Owen Jones, an honest furrier in Thames Street, kindled by the love of fatherland, offered the Welsh public a costly present of the "Archai-

Every people have tales which do not require to be written to be remembered, whose shortness is the salt which preserves them through generations. Our ancestors long had heard of "Breton lays" and "British tales," from the days of Chaucer to those of Milton; but it was reserved for our own day to ascertain the species, and to possess those forgotten yet imaginative effusions of the ancient Celtic genius. Our literary antiquaries have discovered reposing among the Harleian manuscripts the writings of Marie de France *, an Anglo-Norman poetess, who in the 13th century versified many old Breton Lais,

ology of Wales," containing the Bardic poetry, genealogies, triads, chronicles, &c. in their originals: the haughty descendant of the Cymry disdained to translate for the Anglo-Saxon. To Mr. William Owen the lore of Cambria stands deeply indebted for his persevering efforts. Under the name of Meirion he long continued his literal versions of the Welsh bards in the early volumes of the Monthly Magazine; he has furnished a Cambrian biography and a Dictionary.

Some years ago, a learned Welsh scholar, Dr. Owen Pughe, issued proposals to publish the Mabinogion, accompanied by translations, on the completion of a subscription list sufficient to indemnify the costs of printing.—See Mr. Crofton Croker's interesting Work on Fairy Legends, vol. iii. He appealed in vain to the public, but the whole loss remains with them. Recently a munificent lady has resumed the task, and has presented us in the most elegant form with two tales such as ladies read. Since this note was written, several cheering announcements of some important works have been put forth.

* See Warton and Ellis. "Poésies de Marie de France" have been published by M. de Roquefort, Paris, 1820.

which she says "she had heard and well remembered." Who can assure us whether this Anglo-Norman poetess gathered her old tales, for such she calls them, in the French Britain or the English Britain, where she always resided?

It is among the Welsh we find a singular form of artificial memory which can be traced among no other people. These are their TRIADS. Though unauthorised by the learned in Celtic antiquities, I have sometimes fancied that in the form we may possess a relic of druidical genius. A triad is formed by classing together three things, neither more nor less, but supposed to bear some affinity, though a fourth or a fifth might occur with equal claim to be admitted into the category*. To connect three things together apparently analogous, though in reality not so, sufficed for the stores of knowledge of a Triadist; but to fix on any three incidents for an historical triad discovered a very narrow range of research; and if designed as an artificial memory, three insulated facts, deprived of dates or descriptions or connexion,

* "The translators do the triadist an injustice in rendering *Tri* by '*The Three*' when he has put no *The* at all. The number was accounted fortunate, and they took a pleasure in binding up all their ideas into little sheaves or fasciculi of three; but in so doing they did not mean to imply that there were no more such."—*Britannia after the Romans.*

neither settled the chronology, nor enlarged the understanding. It is, however, worthy of remark, that when the Triad is of an ethical cast, the number *three* may compose an excellent aphorism; for three things may be predicated with poignant concision, when they relate to our moral qualities, or to the intellectual faculties: in this capricious form the Triad has often afforded an enduring principle of human conduct, or of critical discrimination; for our feelings are less problematical than historical events, and more permanent than the recollection of three names*.

* As these artificial associations, like the topics invented by the Roman rhetoricians, have been ridiculed by those who have probably formed their notions from unskilful versions, I select a few which might enter into the philosophy of the human mind. They denote a literature far advanced in critical refinement, and appear to have been composed from the sixth to the twelfth century.

"The three foundations of genius; the gift of God, human exertion, and the events of life."

"The three first requisites of genius; an eye to see nature, a heart to feel it, and a resolution that dares follow it."

"The three things indispensable to genius; understanding, meditation, and perseverance.

"The three things that improve genius; proper exertion, frequent exertion, and successful exertion."

"The three qualifications of poetry; endowment of genius, judgment from experience, and felicity of thought."

"The three pillars of judgment; bold design, frequent practice, and frequent mistakes."

"The three pillars of learning; seeing much, suffering much, and studying much." See Turner's "Vindication of the Ancient British Bards."—Owen's Dissertation on Bardism, prefixed to the Heroic Elegies of Llywarç Hen.

THE NAME OF ENGLAND AND OF THE ENGLISH.

Two brothers and adventurers of an obscure Saxon tribe raised their ensign of the White Horse on British land: the visit was opportune, or it was expected—this remains a state-secret. Right welcomed by the British monarch and his perplexed council amid their intestine dissensions, as friendly allies renowned for their short and crooked swords called Saxons, which had given a generic name to their tribes.

These descendants of Woden, for such even the petty chieftains deemed themselves, whose trade was battle and whose glory was pillage, showed the spiritless what men do who know to conquer, the few against the many. They baffled the strong and they annihilated the weak. The Britons were grateful. The Saxons lodged in the land till they took possession of it. The first Saxon founded the kingdom of Kent; twenty years after, a second in Sussex raised the kingdom of the South-Saxons; in another twenty years appeared the kingdom of the West-Saxons. It was a century after the earliest arrival that the great emigration took place. The tribe of the Angles depopulated their native province and flocked to the fertile island, under that foe-

man of the Britons whom the bards describe as "The Flame Bearer," and "The Destroyer." Every quality peculiar to the Saxons was hateful to the Britons; even their fairness of complexion. Taliessin terms Hengist "a white-bellied hackney," and his followers are described as of "hateful hue and hateful form." The British poet delights to paint "a Saxon shivering and quaking, his *white hair* washed in blood;" and another sings how "close upon the backs of the *pale-faced* ones were the spear-points *."

Already the name itself of *Britain* had disappeared among the invaders. Our island was now called "Saxony beyond the Sea," or "West Saxon land;" and when the expatriated Saxons had alienated themselves from the land of their fathers, those who remained faithful to their native hearths perhaps proudly distinguished themselves as "the old Saxons," for by this name they were known by the Saxons in Britain.

Eight separate, but uncertain kingdoms, were raised on the soil of Britain, and present a moveable surface of fraternal wars and baffled rivals. There was one kingdom long left kingless, for "No man dared, though never so ambitious, to take up the sceptre which many had found so hot; the only effectual cure of ambition that I have read"—these are the words of Milton.

* Britannia after the Romans, 62, 4to.

Finally, to use the quaint phrase of the Chancellor Whitelock, "the Octarchy was brought into one." At the end of five centuries the Saxons fell prostrate before a stronger race.

But of all the accidents and the fortunes of the Saxon dynasty, not the least surprising is that an obscure town in the duchy of Sleswick, *Anglen*, is commemorated by the transference of its name to one of the great European nations. The *Angles*, or *Engles*, have given their denomination to the land of Britain—*Engle-land* is *England*, and the *Engles* are the *English* *.

How it happened that the very name of *Britain* was abolished, and why the Anglian was selected in preference to the more eminent race, may offer a philosophical illustration of the accidental nature of LOCAL NAMES.

There is a tale familiar to us from youth, that Egbert, the more powerful king of the West Saxons, was crowned the first monarch of England, and issued a decree that this kingdom of Britain should be called England; yet

* It is a singular circumstance that our neighbours have preserved the name of our country more perfectly than we have done by our mutilated term of *England*, for they write it with antiquarian precision, *Angle-terre*—the land of the Angles. Our counties bear the vestiges of these Saxons expelling or exterminating the native Britons, as our pious Camden ejaculates, "by God's wonderful providence."

an event so strange as to have occasioned the change of the name of the whole country remains unauthenticated by any of the original writers of our annals *. No record attests that Egbert in a solemn coronation assumed the title of "King of England." His son and successor never claimed such a legitimate title; and even our illustrious Alfred, subsequently, only styled himself "King of the West Saxons."

The story, however, is of ancient standing; for Matthew of Westminster alludes to a similar if not the same incident, namely, that by "a common decree of all the Saxon kings, it was ordained that the title of the island should no longer be Britain, from Brute, but henceforward be called from the English, England." Stowe furnishes a positive circumstance in this obscure transaction—"Egbert caused the brazen image of Cadwaline, King of the Britons, to be thrown down." The decree noticed by Matthew of Westminster, combined with the fact of pulling down the statue of a popular British monarch, betrays the real motive of this

* The diligent investigator of the history of our Anglo-Saxons concludes that this unauthorised tale of the coronation and the decree of Egbert is unworthy of credence.

Camden, in his first edition, had fixed the date of the change of the name as occurring in the year 810; in his second edition he corrected it to 800. Holinshed says *about* 800. Speed gives a much later date, 819. It is evident that these disagreeing dates are all hazarded conjectures.

singular national change: whether it were the suggestion of Egbert, or the unanimous agreement of the assembled monarchs who were his tributary kings, it was a stroke of deep political wisdom; it knitted the members into one common body, under one name, abolishing, by legislative measures, the very memory of Britain from the land. Although, therefore, no positive evidence has been produced, the state policy carries an internal evidence which yields some sanction to the obscure tradition.

It is a nicer difficulty to account for the choice of the Anglian name. It might have been preferred to distinguish the Saxons of Britain from the Saxons of the Continent; or the name was adopted, being that of the far more numerous race among these people. Four kingdoms of the octarchy were possessed by the Angles. Thus doubtful and obscure remains the real origin of our national name, which hitherto has hinged on a suspicious fact.

The casual occurrence of the ENGLES leaving their name to this land has bestowed on our country a foreign designation; and—for the contingency was nearly occurring—had the kingdom of Northumbria preserved its ascendency in the octarchy, the seat of dominion had been altered. In that case, the Lowlands of Scotland would have formed a portion of England; York would

have stood forth as the metropolis of Britain, and London had been but a remote mart for her port and her commerce. Another idiom, perhaps too other manners, had changed the whole face of the country. We had been Northmen, not Southerns; our neighbourhood had not proved so troublesome to France. But the kingdom of Wessex prevailed, and became the sole monarchy of England. Such local contingencies have decided the character of a whole people*.

The history of LOCAL NAMES is one of the most capricious and fortuitous in the history of man; the etymologist must not be implicitly trusted, for it is necessary to be acquainted with the history of a people as much as the history of languages, to be certain of local derivations. We have recently been cautioned by a sojourner in the most ancient of kingdoms†, not too confidently to rely on etymology, or to assign too positively any reason for the origin of LOCAL NAMES. No etymologist could have accounted for the name of our nation had he not had recourse to our annals. Sir Walter RALEIGH, from his observations in the New World, has confirmed this observation by circumstances

* "Mitford's Harmony of Language," 429. I might have placed this possible circumstance in the article "A History of Events which have not happened," in "Curiosities of Literature."

† Sir GARDINER WILKINSON, in the curious volume of his recondite discoveries in the land of the Pyramids.

which probably remain unknown to the present inhabitants. The actual names given to those places in America which they still retain, are nothing more than the blunders of the first Europeans, demanding by signs and catching at words by which neither party were intelligible to one another*.

* History of the World, 167, fo. 1666. We have also a curious account of the ancient manner of naming persons and places among our own nation in venerable *Lambarde's Perambulations of Kent*, 349, 453.

THE ANGLO-SAXONS.

THE history and literature of England are involved in the transactions of a people who, living in such remote times at the highest of their fortunes, never advanced beyond a semi-civilisation. But political freedom was the hardy and jealous offspring nursed in the forests of Germany; there was first heard the proclamation of equal laws, and there a people first assumed the name of Franks or Free-men. Our language, and our laws, and our customs, originate with our Teutonic ancestors; among them we are to look for the trunk, if not the branches, of our national establishments. In the rude antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon church, our theoretical inquirers in ecclesiastical history trace purer doctrines and a more primitive discipline; and in the shadowy Witenagemot, the moveable elements of the British constitution: the language and literature of England still lie under their influence, for this people everywhere left the impression of a strong hand.

The history of the Anglo-Saxons as a people is without a parallel in the annals of a nation. Their story during five centuries of dominion in this land

may be said to have been unknown to generations of Englishmen; the monuments of their history, the veritable records of their customs and manners, their polity, their laws, their institutions, their literature, whatever reveals the genius of a people, lie entombed in their own contemporary manuscripts, and in another source which we long neglected—in those ancient volumes of their northern brothers, who had not been idle observers of the transactions of England, which seems often to have been to them "the land of promise." The Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, those authentic testimonies of the existence of the nation, were long dispersed, neglected, even unintelligible, disfigured by strange characters, and obscured by perplexing forms of diction. The language as well as the writing had passed away; all had fallen into desuetude; and no one suspected that the history of a whole people so utterly cast into forgetfulness could ever be written.

But the lost language and the forgotten characters antiquity and religion seemed to have consecrated in the eyes of the learned Archbishop MATTHEW PARKER, who was the first to attempt their restitution by an innocent stratagem. To his edition of Thomas Walsingham's History in 1574, his Grace added the Life of Alfred by this king's secretary, Asser, *printed in the Saxon character;* we are told, as "an invita-

tion to English readers to draw them in unawares to an acquaintance with the *handwriting of their ancestors**." "The invitation" was somewhat awful, and whether the guests were delighted or dismayed, let some Saxonist tell! SPELMAN, the great legal archæologist, was among the earliest who ventured to search amid the Anglo-Saxon duskiness, at a time when he knew not one who could even interpret the writing. This great lawyer had been perplexed by many barbarous names and terms which had become obsolete; they were Saxon. He was driven to the study; and his "Glossary" is too humble a title for that treasure of law and antiquity, of history and of disquisition, which astonished the learned world at home and abroad—while the unsold copies during the life of the author checked the continuation; so few was the number of students, and few they must still be; yet the devotion of its votary was not the less, for he had prepared the foundation of a Saxon professorship. Spelman was the father; but he who enlarged the inheritance of these Anglo-Saxon studies, appeared in the learned SOMNER; and though he lived through distracted times which loved not antiquity, the cell of the antiquary was hallowed by the restituted lore. HICKES, in his elaborate

* Bp. Nicholson's Eng. Lib.

"Thesaurus," displayed a literature which had never been read, and which he himself had not yet learned to read. These were giants; their successors were dwarfs who could not add to their stores, and little heeded their possessions. Few rarely succeeded in reading the Saxon; and at that day, about the year 1700, no printer could cast the types, which were deemed barbarous, or, as the antiquary Rowe Mores expresses it, "unsightly to politer eyes." A lady—and she is not the only one who has found pleasure in studying this ancient language of our country—Mrs. ELSTOB, the niece of Hickes, patronised by a celebrated Duchess of Portland, furnished several versions; but the Saxon Homilies she had begun to print, for some unknown cause, were suspended: the unpublished but printed sheets are preserved at our National Library. These pursuits having long languished, seemed wholly to disappear from our literature.

None of our historians from MILTON to HUME ever referred to an original Saxon authority. They took their representations from the writings of the monks; but the true history of the Anglo-Saxons was not written in Latin. It was not from monkish scribes, who recorded public events in which the Saxons had no influence, that the domestic history of a race dispossessed of all power could be drawn, and far less

would they record the polity which had once constituted their lost independence. The annalist of the monastery, flourishing under another dynasty, placed in other times and amid other manners, was estranged from any community of feeling with a people who were then sunk into the helots of England. MILTON, in his history of Britain, imagined that the transactions of the Anglo-Saxon Heptarchy, or Octarchy, would be as worthless "to chronicle as the wars of kites or crows flocking and fighting in the air." Thus a poet-historian can veil by a brilliant metaphor the want of that knowledge which he contemns before he has acquired—this was less pardonable in a philosopher; and when HUME observed, perhaps with the eyes of Milton, that "he would hasten through the obscure and uninteresting period of Saxon Annals," however cheering to his reader was the calmness of his indolence, the philosopher, in truth, was wholly unconscious that these "obscure and uninteresting annals of the Anglo-Saxons" formed of themselves a complete history, offering new results for his profound and luminous speculations on the political state of man. Genius is often obsequious to its predecessors, and we track BURKE in the path of Hume; and so late as in 1794, we find our elegant antiquary, Bishop PERCY, lamenting the scanty and defective annals of

the Anglo-Saxons; naked epitomes, bare of the slightest indications of the people themselves. The history of the dwellers in our land had hitherto yielded no traces of the customs and domestic economy of the nation; all beyond some public events was left in darkness and conjecture.

We find ELLIS and RITSON still erring in the trackless paths. All this national antiquity was wholly unsuspected by these zealous investigators. In this uncertain condition stood the history of the Anglo-Saxons, when a new light rose in the hemisphere, and revealed to the English public a whole antiquity of so many centuries. In 1805, for the first time, the story and the literature of the Anglo-Saxons was given to the country. It was our studious explorer, SHARON TURNER, who first opened these untried ways in our national antiquities *.

Anglo-Saxon studies have been recently renovated, but unexpected difficulties have started up. A language whose syntax has not been regulated, whose dialects can never be discriminated, and whose orthography and orthoepy seem irrecoverable, yields faithless texts when confronted; and treacherous must be the

* It is pleasing to record a noble instance of the enthusiasm of learned research. "The leisure hours of sixteen years" furnished a comprehensive history of which "two-thirds had not yet appeared."—Mr. Turner's preface.

version if the construction be too literal or too loose, or what happens sometimes, ambiguous. Different anglicisers offer more than one construction *.

It is now ascertained that the Anglo-Saxon manuscripts are found in a most corrupt state †. This fatality was occasioned by the inattention or the unskilfulness of the calligrapher, whose task must have required a learned pen. The Anglo-Saxon verse was regulated by a puerile system of alliteration ‡, and the rhythm depended on accentuation. Whenever the strokes, or dots, marking the accent or the pauses are omitted, or misplaced, whole sentences are thrown into confusion;

* A sufferer, moreover, fully assures us that some remain, which "must baffle all conjecture;" and another critic has judicially decreed that, in every translation from the Anglo-Saxon that has fallen under his notice, "there are blunders enough to satisfy the most unfriendly critic." "The Song of the Traveller," in "The Exeter Book," was translated by CONYBEARE; a more accurate transcript was given by Mr. KEMBLE in his edition of Beowulf; and now Mr. GUEST has furnished a third, varying from both. We cannot be certain that a fourth may not correct the three.

† "Without exception!" is the energetic cry of the translator of Beowulf.

‡ The first line contains two words commencing with the same letter, and the second line has its first word also beginning with that letter. This difficulty seems insurmountable to a modern reader, for our authority confesses that, "In the Saxon poetry, as it is preserved in manuscripts, the first line often contains but one alliterating word, and, from the negligence of the scribes, the alliteration is in many instances entirely lost."—*Dissertation on Anglo-Saxon Poetry, Fraser's Mag.* xii. 81.

compound words are disjoined, and separate words are jumbled together. "Nouns have been mistaken for verbs, and particles for nouns."

These difficulties, arising from unskilful copyists, are infinitely increased by the genius of the Anglo-Saxon poets themselves. The torturous inversion of their composition often leaves an ambiguous sense: their perpetual periphrasis; their abrupt transitions; their pompous inflations, and their elliptical style; and not less their portentous metaphorical nomenclature where a single object must be recognised by twenty denominations, not always appropriate, and too often clouded by the most remote and dark analogies*—all these

* A striking instance how long a universal error can last, arising from one of these obscure conceits, is noticed by Mr. GRENVILLE PIGOTT in his "Manual of Scandinavian Mythology."

These warlike barbarians were long reproached that even their religion fomented an implacable hatred of their enemies; for in the future state of their paradisiacal Valhalla, their deceased heroes rejoiced at their celestial compotations, *to drink out of the skulls of their enemies.*

A passage in the death-song of Regner Lodbrog, literally translated, is, "Soon shall we *drink* out of the *curved trees of the head*;" which Bishop Percy translates, "Soon, in the splendid hall of Odin, we shall drink beer out of the skulls of our enemies." And thus also have the Danes themselves, the Germans, and the French.

The original and extraordinary blunder lies with Olaus Wormius, the great Danish antiquary, to whose authority poets and historians bowed without looking further. Our grave Olaus was bewildered by this monstrous style of the Scalds, and translated this drinking bout at Valhalla according to his own fancy,—"Ex concavis crater-

have perplexed the most skilful judges, who have not only misinterpreted passages, but have even failed to comprehend the very subject of their original. This last circumstance has been remarkably shown in the fate of the heroic tale of BEOWULF. When it first fell to the hard lot of WANLEY, the librarian of the earl of Oxford, to describe "The Exploits of Beowulf," he imagined, or conjectured, that it contained "the wars which this Dane waged against the reguli, or petty kings of Sweden." He probably decided on the subject by confining his view to the opening page, where a hero descends from his ship—but for a very different purpose from a military expedition. Fortunately Wanley lauded the manuscript as a "tractatus nobilissimus," and an "egregium exemplum" of the Anglo-Saxon poetry. Probably

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ibus craniorum;"—thus turning the "trees of the head" into a "skull," and the skull into a hollow cup. The Scald, however, was innocent of this barbarous invention; and, in his violent figures and disordered fancy, merely alluded to the branching horns, growing as trees, from the heads of animals—that is, the curved horns which formed their drinking-cups. If Olaus here, like Homer, nodded, something might be urged for his defence; for who is bound to understand such remote, if not absurd conceits? but I do not know that we could plead as fairly for his own interpolating fancy of "drinking out of the skulls of their enemies."

This grave blunder became universal, and a century passed away without its being detected. It was so familiar, that Peter Pindar once said that the booksellers, like the heroes of Valhalla, drank their wine out of the skulls of authors.

this manuscript remained unopened during a century, when SHARON TURNER detected the error of Wanley, but he himself misconceived the design of these romantic "Exploits." Yet this diligent historian carefully read and analysed this heroic tale. CONYBEARE, who had fallen into the same erroneous conception, at length caught up a clue in this labyrinth; and finally even a safer issue has been found, though possibly not without some desperate efforts, by the version of Mr. KEMBLE.

Even the learned in Saxon have not always been able to distinguish this verse from prose; the verse unmarked by rhyme being written continuously as prose*. A diction turgid and obscure was apparent; but in what consisted the art of the poet, or their metrical system, long baffled the most ingenious conjectures. RITSON, in his perplexity, described this poetry or metre as "a rhymeless sort of poetry, a kind of bombast or insane prose, from which it is very difficult to be distinguished." TYRWHIT and ELLIS remained wholly at a loss to comprehend the fabric of Anglo-Saxon poesy. HICKES, in the fascination of scholarship, had decided that it proceeded on a metrical system of syllabic quantities, and surmounted all dif-

* HICKES and WANLEY mistook the "*Ormulum*," a paraphrase of Gospel history, as mere prose; when in fact it is composed in long lines of fifteen syllables without rhyme.

ficulties by submitting the rhythmical cadences of Gothic poesy to the prosody of classical antiquity. This was a literary hallucination, and a remarkable evidence of a favourite position maintained merely by the force of prepossession.

To what cause are we to ascribe the complex construction of the diction, and the multiplied intricacies of the metres of the poetry of the Northmen? Bishop Percy noticed, that the historian of the Runic poetry has counted up among the ancient Islandic poets one hundred and thirty-six different metres. The Islandic and the Anglo-Saxon are cognate languages, being both dialects of the ancient Gothic or Teutonic. The genius of the Danish Scalds often displays in their Eddas* a sublime creative power far out of the reach of the creeping and narrow faculty of the Saxon, yet the same mechanism regulated both; the fixed recurrence of certain letters or syllables which constitutes that perpetual alliteration, which oftener than rhyme gratified the ear of barbaric poesy, and a metaphorical phraseology or poetical vocabulary appropriated by the bards,

* See "A Manual of Scandinavian Mythology, by Mr. Grenville Pigott. 1839." "The Northern Mythology" will be found here, not only skilfully arranged, but its wondrous myths and fables elucidated by modern antiquaries. It is further illustrated by the translation of the poem of Œhlenschläger, on "The Gods of the North;" whose genius has been transfused in the nervous simplicity of the present version.

furnishing the adept with phrases when he had not always ready any novel conceptions. Shall we deem such arbitrary forms, and such artificial contrivances, the mere childishness of tastes, to have been invented in the wintry years of these climates, to amuse themselves in their stern solitudes; or rather, may we not consider them as a mystery of the Craft, the initiation of the Order? for by this scholar-like discipline in multiplying difficulties, the later bards separated themselves from those humbler minstrels who were left to their own inartificial emotions.

Such prescribed formulæ, and such a mechanism of verse, must have tethered the imagination in a perpetual circle; it was art which violated the free course of nature. In this condition we often find even the poetry of the Scandinavians. The famous death-song of Regner Lodbrog seems little more than an iteration of the same ideas. An Anglo-Saxon poem has the appearance of a collection of short hints rather than poetical conceptions, curt and ejaculative; a paucity of objects yields but a paucity of emotions, too vague for detail, too abrupt for deep passion, too poor in fancy to scatter the imagery of poesy. The Anglo-Saxon betrays its confined and monotonous genius; we are in the first age of art, when pictures are but monochromes of a single colour. Hence, in the whole map of Anglo-Saxon

poetry, it is difficult to discriminate one writer from another *.

Their prose has taken a more natural character than their verse. The writings of Alfred are a model of the Anglo-Saxon style in its purest state—they have never been collected, but it is said they would form three 8vo volumes; they consist chiefly of translations.

The recent versions in literal prose by two erudite Saxonists, of two of the most remarkable Anglo-Saxon poems, will enable an English reader to form a tolerable notion of the genius of this literature. CONYBEARE's

* Such is the critical decision of CONYBEARE, a glorious enthusiast. "Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry, by John Josias Conybeare. 1826."

The late Mr. Price, the editor of Warton's History, announced an elaborate work on the Anglo-Saxon poetry. The verse of CONYBEARE and the disquisitions of PRICE would have completed this cycle of our ancient poetry. But a fatal coincidence marked the destiny of these eminent votaries of our poetic antiquity—both prematurely ceasing to exist while occupied on their works. CONYBEARE has survived in his brother, whose congenial tastes collected his remains; PRICE, who had long resided abroad, and there had silently stored up the whole wealth of Northern Literature, on his return home remained little known till his valued edition of Warton announced to the literary world the acquisitions they were about to receive. He has left a name behind him, but not a work, for Price had no fraternal friend.

Since this chapter was written, Mr. Thos. Wright has published "An Essay on the State of Literature and Learning under the Anglo-Saxons." It displays a comprehensive view taken by one to whose zealous labours the lovers of our ancient literature are so deeply indebted.

poetical versions remained unrivalled. But if a literal version of a primitive poetry soon ceases to be poetry, so likewise if the rude outlines are to be retouched, and a brilliant colouring is to be borrowed, we are receiving Anglo-Saxon poetry in the cadences of Milton, and "the orient hues" of Gray.

CÆDMON AND MILTON.

CÆDMON, the Saxonists hail as "the Father of English Song!"

The personal history of this bard is given in the taste of the age. Cædmon was a herdsman who had never read a single poem. Sitting in his "beership," whenever the circling harp, that "Wood of Joy!" as the Saxon gleemen have called it, was offered to his hand, all unskilled, the peasant, stung with shame, would hurry homewards. Already past the middle of life, never had the peasant dreamt that he was a sublime poet, or at least a poet composing on sublime themes, incapable as he was even of reading his own Saxon.

As once he lay slumbering in a stall, the apparition of a strange man thus familiarly greeted him:—"Cædmon, sing some song to me!" The cowherd modestly urged that he was mute and unmusical;—"Nevertheless thou shalt sing!" retorted the benignant apparition. "What shall I sing?" rejoined the minstrel, who had never sung. "Sing the origin of things!" The peasant, amazed, found his tongue loosened, and listened to his own voice; a voice which was to reach posterity!

He flew in the morning to the town-reeve to announce

a wonder, that he had become a poet in the course of a single night. He recited the poem, which, however, for we possess it, only proves that between sleeping and waking eighteen lines of dreamy periphrasis may express a single idea. Venerable Bede held this effusion as a pure inspiration: the modern historian of the Anglo-Saxons indulgently discovers three ideas: Conybeare, more critical, acknowledges, that "the eighteen lines expand the mere proposition of 'Let us praise God, the maker of heaven and earth.'" But this was only the first attempt of a great enterprise—it was a thing to be magnified for the neighbouring monastery of Whitby, who gladly received such a new brother.

For a poet who had never written a verse it was only necessary to open his vein; a poet who could not read only required to be read to. The whole monkery came down with the canonical books; they informed him of all things, from "Genesis" down to "the doctrine of the apostles." "The good man listened," as saith Venerable Bede, "like a clean animal ruminating; and his song and his verse were so winsome to hear, that his teachers wrote them down, and learned from his mouth." These teachers could not have learned more than they themselves had taught. We can only draw out of a cistern the waters which we have poured into it. Every succeeding day, however, swelled the Cædmonian Poem;

assuredly there wanted neither zeal nor hands—for the glory of the monastery of Whitby!

Such is a literary anecdote of the seventh century conveyed to us by ancient Bede. The dream of the apparition's inspiration of this unlettered monk was one more miracle among many in honour of the monastery; and it was to be told in the customary way, for never yet in a holy brotherhood was found a recusant.

Even to this day we ourselves dream grotesque adventures; but in the days of monachism, visions were not merely a mere vivid and lengthened dream, a slight delirium, for they usually announced something important. A dream was a prognostic or a prelude. The garrulous chroniclers, and saintly Bede himself, that primeval gossiper, afford abundant evidence of such secret revelations. Whenever some great act was designed, or some awful secret was to be divulged, a dream announced it to the world. Was a king to be converted to Christianity, the people were enlightened by the vision which the sovereign revealed to them; was a maiden to take the vow of virginity, or a monastery to be built, an angelical vision hovered, and sometimes specified the very spot. Was a crime of blood to be divulged by some penitent accessory, somebody had a dream, and the criminal has stood convicted by the grave-side, which gave up the fatal witness in his victim.

In those ages of simplicity and pious frauds, a dream was an admirable expedient by which important events were carried on, and mystification satisfactorily explained the incomprehensible.

The marvellous incident on which the history of Cædmon revolves may only veil a fact which has nothing extraordinary in itself when freed from the invention which disguises it. Legends like the present one were often borrowed by one monastery from another, and an exact counterpart of the dream and history of our Saxon bard, in a similar personage and a like result, has been pointed out as occurring in Gaul. A vernacular or popular version of the Scriptures being required, it was supplied by a *peasant wholly ignorant of the poetic art till he had been instructed in a* DREAM*.

* Sir Francis Palgrave's Dissertation on Cædmon, in the Archæologia.

In another work this erudite antiquary explains the marvellous part of Cædmon's history by "natural causes;" and such a principle of investigation is truly philosophical; but we must not look over imposture in the search for "natural causes." "Cædmon's inability to perform his task," observes our learned expositor, "appears to have arisen rather from the want of musical knowledge than from his dulness, and therefore it is quite possible that *allowing for some little exaggeration*, his poetical talents may have been *suddenly developed in the manner described.*"—Hist. of England, i. 162. Thus, the Saxon Milton rose in one memorable night after a whole life passed without the poet once surmising himself to be poetical; and thus, for we consent not to yield up a single point in the narrative of "the Dream," appeared the patronising apparition

Scriptural themes were common with the poets of the monastery*. The present enterprise, judging from the variety of its fragments from both Testaments and from the Apocrypha, in its complete state would have formed a chronological poem of the main incidents of the Scriptures in the vernacular Saxon. This was a burden of magnitude which no single shoulder could have steadily carried, and probably was

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and the exhilarating dialogue. A lingering lover of the Mediæval genius can perceive nothing more in a *circumstantial legend*, than "a little exaggeration." I seem to hear the shrill attenuated tones of Ritson, in his usual idiomatic diction, screaming, "It is a *Lie* and an *Imposture* of the stinking *Monks!*"

The Viscount de Chateaubriand is infinitely more amusing than the plodders in the "weary ways of antiquity." The mystical tale of the Saxon monk is dashed into a glittering foam of ænigmatical brevity. "*Cædmon rêvait en vers et composait des poèmes en dormant; Poésie est Songe.*" And thus dreams may be expounded by Dreams!—*Essai sur la Littérature Anglaise*, i. 55.

* "The Six Days of the Creation" offered a subject for an heroic poem to Dracontius, a Spanish monk, in the fifth century, and who was censured for neglecting to honour the seventh by a description of the Sabbath of the Divine repose. It is preserved in Bib. Patrum, vol. viii., and has been published with notes. Genesis and Exodus —the fall of Adam—the Deluge—and the passage of the Red Sea, were themes which invited the sacred effusions of Avitus, the Archbishop of Vienne, who flourished in the sixth century. His writings were collected by Père Sirmond. This Archbishop attacked the Arians, but we have only fragments of these polemical pamphlets; as these were highly orthodox, what is wanting occasioned regrets in a former day. Other histories in Latin verse drawn from the Old Testament are recorded.

supported by several besides "the Dreamer." Critical Saxonists, indeed, have detected a variation in the style, and great inequalities in the work; such discordances indicate that the Paraphrase was occasionally resumed by some successor, as idling monks at a later period were often the continuators of voluminous romances. I would class the Cædmonian poem among the many attempts of the monachal genius to familiarise the people with the miraculous and the religious narratives in the Scriptures, by a paraphrase in the vernacular idiom. The poem may be deemed as equivocal as the poet; the text has been impeached; interpolations and omissions are acknowledged by the learned in Saxon lore. The poem is said to have been written in the seventh century, and the earliest manuscript we possess is of the tenth, suffering in that course of time all the corruptions or variations of the scribes, while the ruder northern dialect has been changed into the more polished southern. If we may confide in a learned conjecture, it may happen that Cædmon is no name at all, but merely a word or a phrase; and thus the entity of the Dreamer of the Monastery of Whitby may vanish in the wind of two Chaldaic syllables*! Be this as it may, for us the

* Among our ancestors all proper names were significant; and when they are not, we have the strongest presumptive reasons for suspect-

poem is an entity, whatever becomes of the pretended Dreamer.

It has become an arduous inquiry whether MILTON has not drawn largely from the obscurity of this monkish Ennius? "In reading Cædmon," says SHARON TURNER, "we are reminded of Milton; of a Paradise Lost in rude miniature." Conybeare advances, "the pride, rebellion, and punishments of Satan and his princes have a resemblance to Milton so remarkable that *much of this portion might be almost literally translated by a cento of lines from the great poet**." A recent Saxonist in noticing "the creation of Cædmon as beautiful," adds, "it is still more interesting from *its singular correspondence even in expression with Paradise Lost.*"

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ing that the name has been borrowed from some other tongue. The piety of many monks in their pilgrimages in the Holy Land would induce them to acquire some knowledge of the Hebrew or even the Chaldee—Bede read Hebrew. A scholar who has justly observed this, somewhat cabalistically has discovered that "the initial word of Genesis in Chaldee," and printed in Hebraic characters בהרסין exhibits the presumed name of the Saxon monk.

* This sort of cento seems to have been a favourite fancy with this masterly versifier; for of another Anglo-Saxon bard who composed on warlike subjects, this critic says, "If the names of Patroclus and Menelaus were substituted for Byrthnoth and Godric, some of the scenes might be almost literally translated into a cento of lines from Homer." Homer's claim to originality, however, is secure from any critical collation with the old Saxon monk.

The ancient, as well as the modern, of these scriptural poets has adopted a narrative which is not found in the Scriptures. The rebellion of Satan before the creation of man, and his precipitation with the apostate angels into a dungeon-gulf of flame, and ice, and darkness, though an incident familiar to us as a gospel text, remains nothing more than a legend unhallowed by sacred writ.

Where are we then to seek for the origin of a notion universal throughout Christendom? I long imagined that this revolt in heaven had been one of the traditions hammered in the old rabbinical forge; and in the Talmudical lore there are tales of the fallen angels; but I am assured by a learned professor in these studies, that the Talmud contains no narrative of "the Rebellion of Satan." The Hebrews in their sojourn in Babylon had imbibed many Chaldean fables, and some fanciful inventions. At this obscure period did this singular episode in sacred history steal into their popular creed? Did it issue from that awful cradle of monstrous imaginings, of demons, of spirits, and of terrifying deities, Persia and India? In the Brahminical Shasters we find a rebellion of the angels before the creation, and their precipitation from light into darkness; their restoration by the clemency of the Creator, however, occurs after their probationary state,

during millions of years in their metamorphoses on earth. But this seems only the veil of an allegory designed to explain their dark doctrine of the Metempsychosis. The rebellion of the angels, as we have been taught it, is associated with their everlasting chains and eternal fire; how the legend became universally received may baffle inquiry*.

But the coincidence of the Cædmonian with the Miltonian poem in having adopted the same peculiar subject of the revolt of Satan and the expulsion of the angels, is not the most remarkable one in the two works. The same awful narrative is pursued, and we are startled at the opening of the Pandemonium by discovering the same scene and the same actors. When we scrutinise into minuter parts, we are occasionally struck by some extraordinary similarities.

* Notwithstanding the information with which I was favoured, I cannot divest myself of the notion that "the rebellion of the angels" must be more explicitly described among the Jewish traditions than yet appears; because we find allusions to it in two of the apostolical writings. In the epistle of Jude, ver. 6: "*The Angels which kept not their first estate*, but left their own habitation, He hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day." And in Peter, ii. 4: "*God spared not the Angels that sinned, but cast them down to Hell*, and delivered them unto chains of darkness to be reserved unto judgment." These texts have admitted of some dispute; but it seems, however, probable, that the apostles, just released from their Jewish bondage, had not emancipated themselves from the received Hebraical doctrines.

Cædmon, to convey a notion of the ejection from heaven to hell, tells, that "the Fiend with all his comrades fell from heaven above, through as long as *three nights and days.*" Milton awfully describes Satan "confounded, though immortal," rolling in the fiery gulf,

> "*Nine times the space that measures day and night*
> To mortal men."

Cædmon describes the Deity having cast the evil angel into that "House of perdition, down on that new bed; after, gave him a *name* that the highest (of the devils which they had now become) should be called *Satan* thenceforwards." Milton has preserved the same notice of the origin of *the name*, thus,

> "To whom the *Arch-Enemy*,
> And thence in heaven called *Satan*—"

Satan in Hebrew signifying "the Enemy," or "the Adversary."

The harangue of Satan to his legions by the Saxon Monk cannot fail to remind us of the first grand scene in the Paradise Lost; however these creations of the two poets be distinct. "The swart hell—a land void of light, and full of flame," is like Milton's

> "——yet from these flames
> No light, but rather darkness visible."

The locality is not unlike—"There they have at even, immeasurably long, each of all the fiends a renewal of

fire—with sulphur charged; but cometh ere dawn the eastern wind frost, bitter-cold, ever fire or dart." This torment we find in the hell of Milton:

"The bitter change
Of fierce extremes, extremes by change more fierce,
From beds of raging *fire* to starve in *ice*."

"The parching air
Burns frore, and *cold performs the effect of fire* *."

The Inferno of Dante has also "its eternal darkness for the dwellers in fierce *heat* and in *ice*†." It is evident that the Saxon, the Italian, and the Briton, had drawn from the same source. The Satan of Cædmon in "the torture-house" is represented as in "the dungeon of perdition." He lies in chains, his feet bound, his hands manacled, his neck fastened by iron bonds; Satan and his crew the monk has degraded into Saxon convicts. Milton indeed has his

"Adamantine chains and penal fire,"

and

"A dungeon horrible on all sides round."

But as Satan was to be the great actor, Milton was soon compelled to find some excuse for freeing the evil spirit from the chains which Heaven had forged, and this he does:

"Chain'd on the burning lake, *nor ever thence*
Had ris'n or heaved his head, but that the will

* Paradise Lost, ii. 594. † Inferno, Canto iii. 5.

And high permission of all-ruling Heaven
Left him at large to his own dark designs,
That with reiterated crimes he might
Heap on himself damnation, while he sought
Evil to others.—"

The Saxon monk had not the dexterity to elude the difficult position in which the arch-fiend was for ever fixed; he was indissolubly chained, and yet much was required to be done. It is not, therefore, Satan himself who goes on the subdolous design of wreaking his revenge on the innocent pair in Paradise; for this he despatches one of his associates, who is thus described: "Prompt in arms, he had a crafty soul; this chief set his helmet on his head; he many speeches knew of guileful words: wheeled up from thence, he *departed through the doors of hell.*" We are reminded of

"The infernal doors, that on their hinges grate
Harsh thunder."

The emissary of Satan in Cædmon had "a strong mind, lion-like in air, *in hostile mood he dashed the fire aside with a fiend's power**." That demon flings aside the flames of hell with the bravery of his sovereign, as we see in Milton,—

"Forthwith upright he rears from off the pool
His mighty stature; *on each hand the flames*
Driv'n backward, slope their pointing spires and, roll'd
In billows, leave in the midst a horrid vale†."

* Cædmon, p. 29. † Paradise Lost, i. 221.

Cædmon thus represents Satan :—" Then spoke the haughty king, who of angels erst was *brightest, fairest in heaven*—beloved of his master—*so beauteous was his form*, he was like to the light stars."

Milton's conception of the form of Satan is the same.

> " His form had not yet lost
> All her *original brightness*, nor appear'd
> Less than archangel ruin'd *.—"

And,

> " His countenance as the *morning star* that guides
> The starry flock, allured them†."

Literary curiosity may be justly excited to account for these apparent resemblances, and to learn whether similarity and coincidence necessarily prove identity and imitation ; and whether, finally, Cædmon was ever known to Milton.

The Cædmonian manuscript is as peculiar in its history as its subject. This poem, which we are told fixed the attention of our ancestors "from the sixth to the twelfth century," and the genius of whose writer was " stamped deeply and lastingly upon the literature of our country‡," had wholly disappeared from any visible existence. It was accidentally discovered only in a single manuscript, the gift of Archbishop Usher to the learned Francis JUNIUS. During thirty years of this

* Paradise Lost, i. 592. † Paradise Lost, v. 798.
‡ Guest's History of English Rhythms, ii. 23.

eminent scholar's residence in England, including his occasional visits to Holland and Friesland, to recover, by the study of the Friesic living dialect, the extinct Anglo-Saxon, he devoted his protracted life to the investigation of the origin of the Gothic dialects. A Saxon poem, considerable for its size and for its theme, in a genuine manuscript, was for our northern student a most precious acquisition; and that this solitary manuscript should not be liable to accidents, Junius printed the original at Amsterdam in 1655, unaccompanied by any translation or by any notes.

We must now have recourse to a few dates.

Milton had fallen blind in 1654. The poet began Paradise Lost about 1658; the composition occupied three years, but the publication was delayed till 1667.

If Milton had any knowledge of Cædmon, it could only have been in the solitary and treasured manuscript of Junius. To have granted even the loan of the only original the world possessed, we may surmise, that Junius would not have slept through all the nights of its absence. And if the Saxon manuscript was ever in the hands of Milton, could our poet have read it?

We have every reason to believe, that Milton did not read Saxon. At that day who did? There were not "ten men to save the city." In Milton's History of England, a loose and solitary reference to the Saxon

Chronicle, then untranslated, was probably found ready at hand; for all his Saxon annals are drawn from the Latin monkish authorities: and in that wonderful list of one hundred dramatic subjects which the poet had set down for the future themes of his muse, there are many on Saxon stories; but all the references are to Speed and Holinshed. The nephew of the poet has enumerated all the languages in which Milton was conversant,—"the Hebrew, (and I think the Syriac,) the Greek, the Latin, the Italian, the Spanish, and French." We find no allusion to any of the northern tongues, which that votary of classical antiquity and of Ausonian melody and fancy would deem—can we doubt it?—dissonant and barbarous. The Northern Scalds were yet as little known as our own Saxons. A recent discovery that Milton once was desirous of reading Dutch may possibly be alleged by the Saxonists as an approach to the study of the Saxon; but at that time Milton was in office as "the secretary for foreign tongues," and in a busy intercourse with the Hollanders*.

* This curious literary information has been disclosed by Roger Williams, the founder of the state of Rhode Island, who was despatched to England in 1651, to obtain the repeal of a charter granted to Mr. Coddington. I give this remarkable passage in the words of this Anglo-American:—"It pleased the Lord to call me for some time and with some persons to practise the Hebrew, the Greek, Latin, French, and Dutch. *The secretary of the council, Mr. Milton, for my Dutch I read him, read me many more lan-*

"Secretary Milton" at that moment was probably anxious to con the phrases of a Dutch state-paper, to scrutinise into the temper of their style. Had Milton ever acquired the Dutch idiom for literary purposes, to study Vondel, the Batavian Shakespeare*, from whom

guages. Grammar rules begin to be esteemed a tyranny. I taught two young gentlemen, a parliament-man's sons, as we teach our children English—by words, phrases, and constant talk, &c." This vague &c. stands so in the original, and leaves his "wondrous tale half-told."—"Memoirs of Roger Williams, the Founder of the State of Rhode Island, by James D. Knowles, professor of pastoral duties in the Newton Theological Institution, 1834," p. 264.

I am indebted for this curious notice to the prompt kindness of my most excellent friend ROBERT SOUTHEY; a name long dear to the public as it will be to posterity; an author the accuracy of whose knowledge does not yield to its extent.

* Mr. SOUTHEY observes, in a letter now before me, that "VONDEL'S *Lucifer* was published in 1654. His *Samson*, the same subject as the Agonistes, 1661. His *Adam*, 1664. CÆDMON, ANDREINI, and VONDEL, each or all, may have led Milton to consider the subject of his Paradise Lost. But Vondel is the one who is most likely to have impressed him. Neither the Dutch nor the language were regarded with disrespect in those days. Vondel was the greatest writer of that language, and the Lucifer is esteemed the best of his tragedies. Milton alone excepted, he was probably the greatest poet then living."

This critical note furnishes curious dates. Milton was blind when the *Lucifer* was published; and there is so much of the personal feelings and condition of the poet himself in his "Samson Agonistes," that it is probable little or no resemblance could be traced in the Hollander. The Adam of Milton, and the whole "Paradise" itself, was completed in 1661. As for *Cædmon*, I submit the present chapter to Mr. Southey's decision.

No great genius appears to have made such free and wise use of

some foreigners imagine our poet might have drawn his "Lucifer," it could not have escaped the nephew in the enumeration of his uncle's philological acquirements. But even to read Dutch was not to read a Saxon manuscript, whose strange characters, uncouth abbreviations, and difficult constructions, are only mastered by long practice. To have known anything about the solitary Cædmon, the poet must have been wholly indebted to the friendly offices of its guardian; a personal intimacy which does not appear. The improbability that this scholar translated the manuscript phrase by phrase, is nearly as great as the supposition that the poet could have retained ideas and expressions to be reproduced in that epic poem, which was not commenced till several years after.

The personal habits of Junius were somewhat peculiar; to his last days he was unrelentingly busied in pursuits of philology, of which he has left to the Bodleian such monuments of his gigantic industry. Junius was such a rigid economist of time, that every hour was allotted to its separate work; each day was the repetition of the former, and on a system he avoided all

his reading as Milton has done, and which has led in several instances to an accusation of what some might term plagiarism. We are not certain that Milton, when not yet blind, may not have read some of those obscure modern Latin poets whom Lauder scented out.

visitors. Such a man could not have submitted to the reckless loss of many a golden day, in hammering at the obscure sense of the Saxon monk, which the critics find by his own printed text he could not always master; nor is it more likely that Milton himself could have sustained his poetic excitement through the tedious progress of a verbal or cursory paraphrase of Scripture history by this Gothic bard. At that day even Junius could not have discovered those "elastic rhythms," which solicit the ear of a more modern Saxon scholar in his studies of Cædmon*, but which we entirely owe to the skill, and punctuation, and accentuation of the recent editor, Mr. Thorpe.

Be it also observed, that Milton published his "Paradise Lost" in the lifetime of Junius, the only judge who could have convicted the bard who had daringly proposed

"——— to pursue
Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme—"

of concealing what he had silently appropriated.

There are so many probabilities against the single possibility of Milton having had any knowledge of Cædmon, that we must decide by the numerical force of our own suggestions.

The startling similarities which have led away critical judgments, if calmly scrutinised, may be found to be

* Guest's History of English Rhythms.

those apparent resemblances or coincidences which poets drawing from the same source would fall into. There is a French mystery of "The Conception," where the scene is hell; Lucifer appeals to its inmates in a long address. This Satan of "The Conception" strikingly reminds us of the Prince of Darkness of Milton, and indeed has many creative touches; and had it been written after the work of Milton, it might have seemed a parody*.

Similarity and coincidence do not necessarily prove identity and imitation. Nor is the singular theme of "the Rebellion of the Angels" peculiar to either poet, since those who never heard of the Saxon monk have constructed whole poems and dramas on the celestial revolt†.

We may be little interested to learn, among all the dubious inquiries of "the origin of Paradise Lost," whether a vast poem, the most elaborate in its parts, and the most perfect in its completion—a work, in the words of the great artist,

"—— who knows how long
Before had been contriving"?—P. L., ix. 138.

* This speech, in which Satan appeals to and characterises his Infernals, may be read in Parfait's analysis of the Mystery.—*Hist. du Théâtre François*, i. 79.

† *L'Angeleida* of VALVASONE, the *Adamo* of ANDREINI, and others.—Hayley's Conjectures on the Origin of Paradise Lost. See also Tiraboschi, and Ginguéné.

was or could be derived from any obscure source. The interval between excellence and mediocrity removes all connexion ; it is that between incurable impotence and genial creation. A great poet can never be essentially indebted even to his prototype.

If we may still be interested in watching the primitive vigour of the self-taught, compared with the intellectual ideal of the poetical character, we must not allow ourselves, as might be shown in one of the critics of the Saxon school, to mistake nature in her first poverty, bare, meagre, squalid, for the moulded nudity of the graces. The nature of Ennius was no more the nature of Virgil, than the nature of Cædmon was that of Milton, for what is obvious and familiar is the reverse of the beautiful and the sublime. We have seen the ideal being,

> "Whose stature reach'd the sky, and on his crest
> Sat Horror plumed—"

by the Saxon monk sunk down to a Saxon convict, "fastened by the neck, his hands manacled, and his feet bound."

Cædmon represents Eve, after having plucked the fruit, hastening to Adam with the apples,—

> "Some in her hands she bare,
> Some in her bosom lay,
> Of the unblest fruit."

However natural or downright may be this specification, it is what could not have occurred with "the bosom" of our naked mother of mankind, and the artistical conception eluded the difficulty of carrying these apples—

> "——— from the tree returning, in her hand
> *A bough of fairest fruit.*"—ix. 850.

In Cædmon it costs Eve a long day to persuade the sturdy Adam, an honest Saxon, to "the dark deed;" and her prudential argument that "it were best to obey the pretended messenger of the Lord than risk his aversion," however natural, is very crafty for so young a sinner. In Milton we find the Ideal, and before Eve speaks one may be certain of Adam's fall—for

> "——— in her face excuse
> Came prologue, and apology too prompt,
> Which with bland words at will, she thus address'd."

A description too metaphysical for the meagre invention of the old Saxon Monk!

We dare not place "the Milton of our forefathers" by the side of the only Milton whom the world will recognise. We would not compare our Saxon poetry to Saxon art, for that was too deplorable; but, to place Cædmon in a parallel with Milton, which Plutarch might have done, for he was not very nice in his resemblances, we might as well compare the formless

forms and the puerile inventions of the rude Saxon artist, profusely exhibited in the drawings of the original manuscript of Cædmon*, with the noble conceptions and the immortal designs of the Sistine Chapel.

* These singular attempts at art may be inspected in above fifty plates, in the Archæologia, vol. xx. We may rejoice at their preservation, for art, even in the attempts of its children, may excite ideas which might not else have occurred to us.

BEOWULF; THE HERO-LIFE.

THE Anglo-Saxon poetical narrative of "The Exploits of Beowulf" forms a striking contrast with the chronological paraphrase of Cædmon. Its genuine antiquity unquestionably renders it a singular curiosity; but it derives an additional interest from its representation of the primitive simplicity of a Homeric period—the infancy of customs and manners and emotions of that Hero-life, which the Homeric poems first painted for mankind:—that Hero-life of which Macpherson in his Ossian caught but imperfect conceptions from the fragments he may have collected, while he metamorphosed his ideal Celtic heroes into those of the sentimental romance of another age and another race.

The northern hordes under their petty chieftains, cast into a parallel position with those princes of Greece whose realms were provinces, and whose people were tribes, often resembled them in the like circumstances, the like characters, and the like manners. Such were those kinglings who could possess themselves of a territory in a single incursion, and whose younger brothers, stealing out of their lone bays, extended their

dominion as "Sea-Kings" on the illimitable ocean *. The war-ship and the mead-hall bring us back to that early era of society, when great men knew only to be heroes, flattered by their bards, whose songs are ever the echoes of their age and their patrons.

We discover these heroes, Danes or Angles, as we find them in the Homeric period, audacious with the self-confidence of their bodily prowess; vaunting, and talkative of their sires and of themselves; the son ever known by denoting the father, and the father by his marriage alliance—that primitive mode of recognition, at a period when, amid the perpetual conflicts of rival chieftains, scarcely any but relations could be friends; the family-bond was a sure claim to protection. Like the Homeric heroes, they were as unrelenting in their hatreds as indissoluble in their partisanship; suspicious of the stranger, but welcoming the guest; we find them rapacious, for plunder was their treasure, and prodigal in their distributions of their golden armlets and weighed silver, for their egotism was as boundless as their violence. Yet pride and glory fermented the coarse leaven of these mighty marauders, who were even chivalric, ere chivalry rose into an order. The religion of these ages was wild

* See the curious delineation of the Vikingr of the North, in Turner's Hist. of the Anglo-Saxons, i. 456, third edition.

as their morality; few heroes but bore some relationship to Woden; and even in their rude paganised Christianity, some mythological name cast its lustre in their genealogies. In the uncritical chronicles of the middle ages it is not always evident whether the mortal was not a divinity. Their mythic legends have thrown confusion into their national annals, often accepted by historians as authentic records*. But if antiquaries still wander among shadows, the poet

* Mr. KEMBLE, the translator of BEOWULF, has extricated himself out of an extraordinary dilemma. The first volume, which exhibits the Anglo-Saxon text, furnished in the preface, with an elaborate abundance, all the historical elucidations of his unknown hero. Subsequently when the second volume appeared, which contains the translation, it is preceded by "A Postscript to the Preface," far more important. Here, with the graceful repentance of precipitate youth, he moans over the past, and warns the reader of "the postscript to cut away the preface root and branch," for all that he had published was delusion! particularly "all that part of my preface which assigns dates to one prince or another, I declare to be null and void!" The result of all this scholar's painful researches is, that Mr. Kemble is left in darkness with Beowulf in his hand; an ambiguous being, whom the legend creates with supernatural energies, and history labours to reduce to mortal dimensions.

The fault is hardly that of our honest Anglo-Saxon, as trustful of the Danes as his forefathers were heretofore. It is these our old masters who, with Count Suhm, the voluminous annalist of Denmark, at their head, have "treated mythic and traditional matters as ascertained history. It is the old story of Minos, Lycurgus, or Numa, furbished up for us in the North." What a delightful phantasmagoria comes out while we remain in darkness! But a Danish Niebuhr may yet illuminate the whole theatre of this Pantheon.

cannot err. BEOWULF may be a god or a nonentity, but the poem which records his exploits must at least be true, true in the manners it paints and the emotions which the poet reveals—the emotions of his contemporaries.

BEOWULF *, a chieftain of the Western Danes, was the Achilles of the North. We first view him with his followers landing on the shores of a Danish kingling. A single ship with an armed company, in those predatory days, could alarm a whole realm. The petty independent provinces of Greece afford a parallel; for Thucydides has marked this period in society, when plunder well fought for was honoured as an heroic enterprise. When a vessel touched on a strange shore, the adventurers were questioned "whether they were

* These Teutonic heroes were frequently denominated by the names of animals, which they sometimes emulated: thus, the hero, exulting in bone and nerve, was known as "the Bear;" the more insatiable, as "the Wolf;" and "the Wild Deer" is the common appellative of a warrior. The term "Deer" was the generic name for animal, and not then restricted to its present particular designation.

"Rats and Mice, and such SMALL DEER,"

baffled our Shakespearean commentators, who rarely looked to the great source of the English language—the Anglo-Saxon, and, in their perplexity, proposed to satisfy the modern reader by a botch of their own—and read *geer* or *cheer*. Percy discovered in the old metrical romance of Sir Bevis of Southampton, the very distich which Edgar had parodied.—*Warton*, iii. 83.

Thieves?" a designation which the inquirers did not intend as a term of reproach, nor was it scorned by the valiant*; for the spoliation of foreigners, at a time when the law of nations had no existence, seemed no disgrace, while it carried with it something of glory, when the chieftain's sword maintained the swarm of his followers, or acquired for himself an extended dominion.

Beowulf was a mailed knight, and his gilded ensign hung like a meteor in the air, and none knew the fate it portended. The warder of the coast, for in those days many a warder kept "ocean-watch" on the sea-cliffs, takes horse, and hastens to the invader; fearlessly he asks, "Whence, and what are ye? Soonest were best to give me answer."

The hero had come not to seek feud, nor to provoke insult, but with the free offering of his own life to relieve the sovereign of the Eastern Danes, whose Thanes, for twelve years, had vainly perished struggling with a mysterious being—one of the accursed progeny of Cain—a foul and solitary creature of the morass and the marsh. In the dead of the night this enemy of man, envious of glory and abhorrent of pleasure, glided into the great hall of state and revelry, raging athirst for the blood of the brave there reposing in slumber.

* Thucydides, Lib. i.

The tale had spread in songs through all Gothland. This life-devourer, who comes veiled in a mist from the marshes, may be some mythic being; but though monstrous, it does little more than play the part of the Polyphemus of antiquity and the Ogre of modern fairyism.

In the timber-palace chambers were but small and few, and the guests of the petty sovereign slept in the one great hall, under whose echoing roof the Witenagemot assembled, and the royal banquet was held; there each man had his "bed and bolster" laid out, with his shield at his head, and his helmet, breast-plate, and spear placed on a rack beside him—"at all times ready for combat both in house and field."

This scene is truly Homeric; and thus we find in the early state of Greece, for the historian records this continual wearing of armour, *like the barbarians*, because "their houses were unfenced, and travelling was unsafe*."

The watchman of the seas leaves not the coast, duteous in his lonely cares; while Beowulf, with his companions, marches onwards. They came to where the streets were paved; an indication in that age of a regal residence. The iron rings in their mailed coats rang as

* Thucydides.

they trod in their "terrible armour." They reach the king's house; they hang up their shields against the lofty wall. They seat themselves on a bench, placing in a circle their mailed coats, their bucklers, and their javelins. This warlike array called forth a Ulysses, "famed for war and wisdom;" they parley; the Thane hastens to announce the warlike but the friendly visitor; and the hero, so famed for valour, yet would not obtrude his person, standing behind the Thane, "for he knew the rule of ceremony." The prince of the East Danes joyfully exclaims, that "he had known Beowulf when a child; he remembered the name of his father, who married the only daughter of Hrethel the Goth. It is said that he has the strength of thirty men in the grip of his hand. God only could have sent him."

Beowulf, he whose beautiful ship had come over "the swan-path," may now peacefully show himself in his warlike array. Beowulf stood upon the dais; his "sark of netted mail" glittered where the armourer's skill had wrought around the war-net. Here we discover the ornamental artist as in the Homeric period. He found the prince of the East Danes, "old and bald" like Priam, seated among his earls. Our hero, whom we have observed so decorous in "his rule of ceremony," now launches forth in the commendation of his own prowess.

He who had come to vanquish a fiend exulted not less in a swimming-match in the seas, "when the waves were boiling with the fury of winter," during seven whole days and nights, combating with the walruses.

The exploits of Beowulf are of a supernatural cast; and this circumstance has bewildered his translator amid mythic allusions, and thus the hero sinks into the incarnation of a Saxon idol,—a protector of the human race. It is difficult to decide whether the marvellous incidents be mythical, or merely the exaggerations of the northern poetic faculty. We, however, learn by these, that corporeal energies and an indomitable spirit were the glories of the hero-life; and the outbreaks of their self-complacency resulted from their own convictions, after many a fierce trial.

Such an heroic race we deem barbarous; but what are the nobler spirits of all times but the creatures of their age? who, however favoured by circumstances, can only do that which is practicable in the condition of society.

Henforth, the son of Eglaff, sate at the feet of the king; jealousy stirred in his breast at the prowess of "the proud sea-farer." This cynical minister of the king ridicules his youthful exploits, and sarcastically assured the hero, that "he has come to a worse matter

now, should he dare to pass the space of one night with the fiend." This personage is the Thersites of our northern Homer—

> "With witty malice studious to defame,
> Scorn all his joy, and laughter all his aim."

And like Thersites, the son of Eglaff receives a blasting reproach:—"I tell thee, son of Eglaff, drunken with mead, that I have greater strength upon the sea than any other man. We two (he alludes to his competitor) when we were but boys, with our naked swords in our hands, where the waves were fiercest, warred with the walruses. The whale-fish dragged me to the bottom of the sea, grim in his gripe; the mighty sea-beast received the war-rush through my hand. The sea became calm so that I beheld the ocean-promontories, as the light broke from the east. Never since have the sea-sailors been hindered of their way; never have I heard of a harder battle by night under the concave of heaven, nor of a man more wretched on the ocean-streams. Of such ambushes and fervour of swords I have not heard ought of thee, else had the fiend I come to vanquish never accomplished such horrors against thy prince. I boast not, therefore, son of Eglaff! but never have I slaughtered those of my kin, for which hast thou incurred damnation, though thy wit be good."

In this state of imperfect civilisation, we discover

already a right conception of the female character. At the banquet the queen appears; she greeted the young Goth, bearing in her own hand the bright sweet liquor in the twisted mead-cup. She went among the young and the old mindful of their races; the free-born queen then sate beside the monarch. There was laughter of heroes. A bard sung serene on "the origin of things," as Iopas sang at the court of Dido, and Demodocus at that of Alcinous. The same bard again excites joy in the hall by some warlike tale. Never was banquet without poet in the Homeric times.

Here our task ends, which was not to analyse the tale of Beowulf, but solely to exhibit the manners of a primeval epoch in society. The whole romance, though but short, bears another striking feature of the mighty minstrel of antiquity; it is far more dramatic than narrative, for the characters discover themselves more by dialogue than by action.

The literary history of this Anglo-Saxon metrical romance is too remarkable to be omitted. It not only cast a new light on a disputed object in our own literary history, but awoke the patriotism of a foreign nation. Beowulf had shared the fate of Cædmon, being preserved only in a single manuscript in the Cottonian Library, where it escaped from the destructive fire of 1731, not however without injury. In

1705, Wanley had attempted to describe it, but he did not surmount the difficulty. Our literary antiquaries, with Ritson for their leader, stubbornly asserted that the Anglo-Saxons had no metrical romance, as they opined by their scanty remains. The learned historian of our Anglo-Saxons, in the progress of his ceaseless pursuit, unburied this hidden treasure—which at once refuted the prevalent notions; but this literary curiosity was fated to excite deeper emotions among the honest Danes.

The existing manuscript of "The Exploits of Beowulf" is of the tenth century; but the poem was evidently composed at a far remoter period; though, as all the personages of the romance are Danes, and all the circumstances are Danish, it may be conjectured, if it be an original Anglo-Saxon poem, that it was written when the Danes had a settlement in some parts of Britain. At Copenhagen the patriotism of literature is ardent. The learned there claimed Beowulf as their own, and alleged that the Anglo-Saxon was the version of a Danish poem; it became one of the most ancient monuments of the early history of their country, and not the least precious to them for its connexion with English affairs. The Danish antiquaries still amuse their imagination with the once Danish kingdom of Northumbria, and still call us "brothers;" as at Caen,

where the whole academy still persist in disputations on the tapestry of Bayeux, and style themselves our "masters."

It was, therefore, a national mortification to the Danes that it was an Englishman who had first made known this relic; and further, that it existed only in the library of England. The learned THORKELIN was despatched on a literary expedition, and a careful transcript of the manuscript of Beowulf was brought to the learned and patriotic Danes. It was finished for the press, accompanied by a translation and a commentary, in 1807. At the siege of Copenhagen a British bomb fell on the study of the hapless scholar, annihilating "Beowulf," transcript, translation, and commentary, the toil of twenty years. It seemed to be felt, by the few whose losses by sieges never appear in royal Gazettes, as not one of the least in that sad day of warfare with "our brothers." THORKELIN was urged to restore the loss. But it was under great disadvantages that his edition was published in 1815. Mr. Kemble has redeemed our honour by publishing a collated edition, afterwards corrected in a second with a literal version. Such versions may supply the wants of the philologist, but for the general reader they are doomed to be read like vocabularies. Yet even thus humbled and obscured, BEOWULF aspires to a

poetic existence. He appeals to nature and excites our imagination—while the monk, CÆDMON, restricted by his faithful creed, and his pertinacious chronology—seems to have afforded more delight by his piety than the other by his genius—and remains renowned as "the Milton of our forefathers!"

THE ANGLO-NORMANS.

THE Anglo-Saxon dominion in England endured for more than five centuries.

A territorial people had ceased to be roving invaders, but stood themselves in dread of the invasions of their own ancient brotherhood. They trembled on their own shores at those predatory hordes who might have reminded them of the lost valour of their own ancestors. But their warlike independence had passed away. And, as a martial abbot declared of his countrymen, "they had taken their swords from their sides and had laid them on the altar, where they had rusted, and their edges were now too dull for the field*." They could not even protect the soil which they had conquered, and often wanted the courage to choose a king of their own race. Sometimes they stood ready to pay tribute to the Dane, and sometimes suffered the throne to be occupied by a Danish monarch. In a state of semi-civilisation their rude luxury hardly veiled their unintellectual character. Feeble sovereigns and a sub-

* Speed, 441. This was said to "the Conqueror," and this abbot of St. Alban's paid dearly for the patriotism which had th become treason.

missive people could not advance into national greatness.

When the Duke of Normandy visited his friend and kinsman, Edward the Confessor, he beheld in England a mimetic Normandy; Norman favourites were courtiers, and Norman soldiers were seen in Saxon castles. Edward, long estranged from his native realm, had received his education in Normandy; and the English court affected to imitate the domestic habits of these French neighbours—the great speaking the foreign idiom in their houses, and writing in French their bills and accompts*. Already there was a faction of frenchified Saxons in the court of the unnational English Sovereign.

William the Norman surveyed an empire already half-Norman; and in the prospect, with his accustomed foresight, he mused on a doubtful succession. A people who had often suffered themselves to fall the prey of their hardier neighbour, lie open for conquest to a more intelligent and polished race.

The victory of Hastings did not necessarily include the conquest of the people, and William still condescended to march to the throne under the shadow of a title. After a short residence of only three months in his newly-acquired realm, "the Conqueror" with-

* A circumstance which Milton has recorded.

drew into his duchy, and there passed a long interval of nine months. William left many an unyielding Saxon; a spirit of resistance, however suppressed, bound men together, and partial insurrections seemed to be pushing on a crisis which might have reversed the conquest of England*.

* Our great lawyers probably imagined that the honour of the country is implicated in the title usually accorded to William the Norman; SPELMAN, the great antiquary, and BLACKSTONE, the historian and the expounder of our laws, have absolutely explained away the assumed title of "the Conqueror" to a mere technical feudal term of "*Conquestor, or acquirer of any estate out of the common course of inheritance.*" The first purchaser (that is, he who brought the estate into the family which at present owns it) was styled "the Conqueror," *and such is still the proper phrase in the law of Scotland.* RITSON is indignant at what he calls "a pitiful forensic quibble."

But another great lawyer and lord chancellor, the sedate WHITELOCKE, positively asserts that "William only conquered Harold and his army; for he never was, nor *pretended to be*, the conqueror of England, although the *sycophant monks of the time* gave him that title."—*Whitelocke's Hist. of England*, 33.

In a charter, granting certain lands for the church of St. Paul's, which Stowe has translated from the record in the Tower, William denominates himself, "by the grace of God, *King of Englishmen*" (Rex Anglorum), and addresses it "to all his well-beloved *French and English People*, greeting."—*Stowe's Survey of London*, 326, *Edit.* 1603. Did William on any occasion declare that he was "the Conqueror" as well as the Sovereign of England? When William attempted to learn the Saxon language, it is obvious that he did not desire to remind his new subjects that he ruled as Voltaire sung of his hero,—

——————— qui regna sur la France,
Par droit de Conquête et par droit de Naissance.

During this mysterious and protracted visit, and apparent abandonment of his new kingdom to the care of others, was a vast scheme of dominion nursed in the councils of Norman nobles, and strengthened by the boundless devotion of hardy adventurers, who were all to share in the present spoliation and the future royalty? In his prescient view did William there anticipate a conquest of long labour and of distant days; the state, the nobles, the ecclesiastics, the people, the land, and the language, all to be changed? Hume has ventured to surmise that the mind of the Norman laboured with this gigantic fabric of dominion. It is probable, however, that this child of a novel policy was submitted to a more natural gestation, and expanded as circumstances favoured its awful growth. One night in December the King suddenly appeared in England, and soon unlimited confiscations and royal grants apportioned the land of the Saxons among the lords of Normandy, and even their lance-bearers. It seemed as if every new-comer brought his castles with him, so rapidly did castles cover the soil*. These were strong-

* The final history of these citadels may illustrate that verse of Goldsmith which reminds us—

"To fly from PETTY TYRANTS—to THE THRONE!"

In the short space of seventy years the owners of those castles bearded even majesty itself; these lords, by their undue share of power, were in perpetual revolt; till two royal persons, though

holds for the tyrant foreigner, or open retreats for his predatory bands; stern overlookers were they of the land!

The Norman lords had courts of their own; sworn vassals to their suzerain, but kinglings to the people. Sometimes they beheld a Saxon lord, whose heart could not tear itself from the lands of his race, a serf on his own soil; but they witnessed without remorse the rights of the sword. Norman prelates were silently substituted for Saxon ecclesiastics, and whole companies of claimants arrived to steal into benefices or rush into abbeys. It was sufficient to be a foreigner and land in England, to become a bishop or an abbot. Church and State were now indissolubly joined, for in the general plunder each took their orderly rank. It was the

opposed to each other, Stephen and Maude, decreed for their mutual interest the demolition of fifteen hundred and fifteen castles. They were razed by commission, or by writs to the sheriffs; and a law was further enacted that "none hereafter, without license, should embattle his house." And thus was broken this aristocracy of castles. See two dissertations on "Castles," by Sir ROBERT SUTTON, and by AGARD; *Curious Discourses by eminent Antiquaries*, i. 104 and 188.

This number of castles seems incredible, possibly many were "embattled houses." My learned friend, the Rev. Joseph Hunter, an antiquary most versant in manuscripts, inclines to think there may be some scriptural error of the ancient scribe, who was likely to add or to leave out a cipher, without much comprehension of the numerals he was transcribing without a thought, like what happened to the eleven thousand virgins of St. Ursula.

triumph of an enlightened, perhaps a cunning race, as the Norman has been proverbially commemorated, over "a rustic and almost an illiterate generation," as the simplicity of our Saxon prelates, who could not always speak French, is described by Ordericus Vitalis, a monk who, long absent from England, wrote in Normandy. Ingulphus, the monk of Croyland, though partial to "the Conqueror," however, honestly confesses that when the English were driven from their dignities, their successors were not always their superiors.

All who were eager to court their new lords were brought to dissemble their native rusticity. They polled their crowns, they cut short their flowing hair, and throwing aside the loose Saxon gown, they assumed the close vest of the more agile Norman. "Mail of iron and coats of steel would have better become them," cried an indignant Saxon. We have seen what a martial Saxon abbot declared to the Conqueror, while he mourned over his pacific countrymen. This was the time when it was held a shame among Englishmen to appear English. It became proverbial to describe a Saxon who ambitioned some distinguished rank, that "he would be a gentleman if he could but talk French!"

Fertile in novelties as was this amazing revolution, the most peculiar was the change of the language. The style of power and authority was Norman; it

interpreted the laws, and it was even to torment the rising-generation of England; children learned the strange idiom by construing their Latin into French, and thus, by learning two foreign languages together, wholly unlearned their own. Not only were they taught to speak French, but the French character was adopted in place of their own alphabet. It was a flagrant instance of the Conqueror's design to annihilate the national language, that finding a College at Oxford with an establishment founded by Alfred to maintain divines who were "to instruct the people in their own vulgar tongue," William decreed that "the annual expense should never after be allowed out of the King's exchequer*."

The Norman prince on his first arrival could have entertained no scheme of changing the language, for he attempted to acquire it. The secretary of the Conqueror has recorded that when the monarch seemed inclined to adopt the customs of his new subjects, which his moderate measures at first indicated, the Norman prince had tried his patience and his ear to babble the obdurate idiom, till he abhorred the sound of the Saxon tongue. If because the Conqueror could not learn the Saxon language he decided wholly to abolish it, this would seem nothing more than a fantastic

* Speed, 440.

tyranny; but in truth, the language of the conquered is usually held in contempt by the conquerors for other reasons besides offending the delicacy of the ear. The Normans could not endure the Saxons' untunable consonants, as it had occurred even to the unlettered Saxons themselves; for barbarians as their hordes were when they first became the masters of Britain, they had declared that the British tongue was utterly barbarous*.

But not at his bidding could the military chief for ever silence the mother-tongue. Enough for "this stern man" to guard the land in peace, while every single hyde of land in England was known to him and "put at its worth in HIS BOOK," as records the Saxon chronicler. The language of a people is not to be conquered as the people themselves. "The birth-tongue" may be imprisoned or banished, but it cannot die—the people think in it; the images of their thoughts, their traditional phrases, the carol over the mead-cup, and their customs far diffused, survived even the iron tongue of the curfew.

The Saxons themselves, who had chased the native

* A curious fact discovered by Mr. Turner in a Cottonian manuscript has brought this circumstance to our knowledge. In a grant of land in Cornwall, an Anglo-Saxon king, after mentioning the Saxon name of the place, adds, "which the inhabitants there called, *barbarico nomine*, by the barbarous name of Pendyfig;" which was the British or Welsh name.—*Vindication of the Ancient British Poems*, 8.

Britons from their land, still found that they could not suppress the language of the fugitive people. The conquerors gave their Anglo-Saxon denominations to the towns and villages they built; but the hills, the forests, and the rivers retain their old Celtic names*. Nature and nationality will outlast the transient policy of a new dynasty.

The novel idiom became the language of those only with whom the court-language, whatever it be, will ever prevail—the men who by their contiguity to the great affect to participate in their influence. In that magic circle of hopes and fears where royalty is the sole magician of the fortunes of men, the Conqueror perpetuated his power by perpetuating his language. Ignorance of the French tongue was deemed a sufficient pretext for banishing an English bishop pertinacious in his nationality, who had for a while been admitted to the royal councils, but whose presence was no longer necessary to the dominant party.

To the successors of the Norman William it might appear that the English idiom was wholly obliterated from the memories of men; not one of our monarchs and statesmen could understand the most ordinary words in the national tongue. When Henry the Second

* Camden has noticed this striking circumstance in his "Britannia." See also Percy's Preface to Mallett's "Northern Antiquities," xxxix.

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was in Pembrokeshire, and was addressed in English—"Goode olde Kynge," the King of England inquired in French of his esquire what was meant? Of the title of "Kynge," we are told that his majesty was wholly ignorant! A ludicrous anecdote of the chancellor of Richard the First is a strange evidence that the English language was wholly a foreign one for the English court. This chancellor in his flight from Canterbury, disguised as a female hawker, carrying under his arm a bundle of cloth, and an ell-measure in his hand, sate by the sea-side waiting for a vessel. The fishermen's wives inquired the price of the cloth, he could only answer by a burst of laughter; for this man, born in England, and chancellor of England, did not know a single word of English! One more evidence will confirm how utterly the Saxon language was cast away. When the famous Grosteste, bishop of Lincoln, (who would no doubt have contemned his Saxon surname of "Great-head,") a voluminous writer, once condescended to instruct "the ignorant," he wrote pious books for their use in French; the bishop making no account of the old national language, nor of the souls of those who spoke it.

When the fate of conquest had overthrown the national language, and thus seemed to have bereaved us of all our literature, it was in reality only diverging

into a new course. For three centuries the popular writers of England composed in the French language. Gaimar, who wrote on our Saxon history; Wace, whose chronicle is a rhymed version of that of Geoffry of Monmouth; Benoit de Saint Maur (or Seymour); Pierre Langtoft, who composed a history of England; Hugh de Rotelande (Rutland), and so many others, were all English; some were descendants from Norman progenitors, but in every other respect they were English. Some were of a third generation.

Our Henry the Third was a prodigal patron of these Anglo-Norman poets. This monarch awarded to a romancer, Rusticien de Pise, who has proclaimed the regal munificence to the world, a couple of fine "chateaux," which I would not, however, translate as has been done by the English term "castles." Well might a romancer so richly remunerated promise his royal patron to finish "the Book of Brut," the never-ending theme to the ear of a British monarch, who, indeed, was anxious to possess such an authentic state-paper. Who this Rusticien de Pise was, one cannot be certain; but he was one of a numerous brood, who, stimulated by "largesses" and fair chateaux, delighted to celebrate the chivalry of the British court, to them a perpetual fountain of honour and preferment. We may now smile at the Count de Tressan's querulous nation-

ality, who is indignant that the writers of the French romances of the Round Table show a marked affectation of dwelling on everything that can contribute to the glory of the throne and court of England, preferring a fabulous Arthur to a true Charlemagne, and English knights to French paladins*. When Tressan wrote, this striking circumstance had not received its true elucidation; the hand of these writers had only flowed with their gratitude; these writers composed to gratify their sovereign, or some noble patron at the English court, for they were English natives or English subjects, long concealed from posterity as Englishmen, by writing in French. It had then escaped the notice of our literary antiquaries at home and abroad, that these Englishmen could have composed in no other language. How imperfect is the catalogue of early English poets by Ritson! for it is since his day that this important fact in our own literary history has been acknowledged by the French themselves, who at length have distinguished between Norman and Anglo-Norman poets. M. Guizot was enabled by the French government to indulge his literary patriotism, by sending a skilful collector to England to search in our libraries for Norman writings; and we are told, that none but Anglo-Norman writers

* See his Preface to the prose romance of "La Fleur des Batailles."

have been found, that is, Englishmen writing on English affairs, and so English that they have not always avoided an unguarded expression of their dislike of foreigners, and even of Normans!

It is worthy of observation, that even those Norman writers who came young into England soon took the colour of the soil, and what rather surprises us, considering the fashion of the court of that period, studied the original national language, translated our Saxon writings, and often mingled in their French verse phrases and terms which to this day we recognise as English. Of this we have an interesting evidence in an Anglo-Norman poetess, but recently known by the name of "Marie de France:" yet had she not written this single verse accidentally,

> "Me nummerai par remembrance,
> *Marie ai num, si sui de France*—"

we should from her subjects, and her perfect knowledge of the vernacular idiom of the English, have placed this Sappho of the thirteenth century among the women of England. This poetess tells us, that she had turned into her French rhymed verse the Æsopian Fables, which one of our kings had translated into English from the Latin. This royal author could have been no other than Alfred, to whom such a collection has been ascribed. We learn from herself the occasion of her

version. Her task was performed for a great personage who read neither Latin nor English; it was done for "the *love* of the renowned Earl William Longsword:"

—— Cunte Willaume,
Le plus vaillant de cest Royaume.

Who would calculate the "largesse" "Count William," this puissant Longsword, cast into the lap of this living muse when she offered all this melodious wisdom; whose beautiful simplicity a child might comprehend, but whose moral and politic truths would throw even the Norman Longsword into a state of rational musing? Her "Lais," short but wild "Breton" tales, which our poetess dedicated to her sovereign, our Henry the Third, are evidence that Marie could also skilfully touch the heart and amuse the fancy.

In her poems, Marie has translated many French terms into pure English, and abounds with allusions to English places and towns whose names have not changed since the thirteenth century. Her local allusions, and her familiar knowledge of the vernacular idiom of the English people, prove that "Marie," though by the accident of birth she may be claimed by France, yet by her early and permanent residence, and by the constant subjects of her writings, her "Breton Tales," and her "Fables" from the English, by her habits and her sympathies, was an Englishwoman.

At this extraordinary period when England was a foreign kingdom, the English people found some solitary friends—and these were the rustic monk and the itinerant minstrel, for they were Saxons, but subjects too mean and remote for the gripe of the Norman, occupied in rooting out their lords to plant his own for ever in the Saxon soil.

The monks, who lived rusticated in their scattered monasteries, sojourners in the midst of their conquered land, often felt their Saxon blood tingle in their veins. Not only did the filial love of their country deepen their sympathies, but a more personal indignation rankled in their secret bosoms, at the foreign intruders, French or Italian,—the tyrannical bishop and the voluptuous abbot. There were indeed monks, and some have been our chroniclers, base-born, humiliated, and living in fear, who in their leiger-books, when they alluded to their new masters, called them "the conquerors," noticed the year when some "conqueror" came in, and recorded what "the conquerors" had enacted. All these "conquerors" designated the foreigners, who were the heads of their houses. But there were other truer Saxons. Inspired equally by their public and their private feeling, these were the first who, throwing aside both Latin and French, addressed the people in the only language intelligible to them. The patriotic monks decided

that the people should be reminded that they were Saxons, and they continued their history in their own language.

This precious relic has come down to us—THE SAXON CHRONICLE* ; but which in fact is a collection of chronicles made by different persons. These Saxon annalists had been eye-witnesses of the transactions they recorded, and this singular detail of incidents as they occurred without comment is a phenomenon in the history of mankind, like that of the history of the Jews contained in the Old Testament, and, like that, as its learned editor has ably observed, "a regular and chronological panorama of a people described in rapid succession by different writers through many ages in their own VERNACULAR LANGUAGE." The mutations in the language of this ancient chronicle are as remarkable as the fortunes of the nation in its progress from rudeness to refinement; nor less observable are the entries in this great political register from the

* Miss Gurney, who has honourably been hailed as "the Elstob of her age," privately printed her own close version of the "Saxon Chronicle" from the printed text, 1810. Happy lady! who, when sickness had made her its prisoner, opened the Saxon Chronicle; and she learned that she might teach the learned.

The Rev. Dr. INGRAM, principal of Trinity College, Oxon., has since published his translation, accompanied by the original, a collation of the manuscripts, and notes critical and explanatory. 1823. 4to. A volume not less valuable than curious.

year one of Christ till 1154, when it abruptly terminates. The meagreness of the earlier recorders contrasts with the more impressive detail of later enlarged and thoughtful minds. When we come to William of Normandy, we have a character of that monarch by one who knew him personally, having lived at his court. It is not only a masterly delineation, but a skilful and steady dissection. The earlier Saxon chronicler has recorded a defeat and retreat which Cæsar suffered in his first invasion, which would be difficult to discover in the commentaries of Cæsar.

The true language of the people lingered on their lips, and it seemed to bestow a shadowy independence to a population in bondage. The remoter the locality, the more obdurate was the Saxon; and these indwellers were latterly distinguished as "Uplandish" by the inhabitants of cities. For about two centuries "the Uplandish" held no social connexion; separated not only by distance, but by their isolated dialects and peculiar customs, these natives of the soil shrank into themselves, intermarrying and dying on the same spot; they were hardly aware that they were without a country.

It was a great result of the Norman government in England that it associated our insular and retired dominion, with that nobler theatre of human affairs, the Continent of Europe. In Normandy we trace the

first footings of our national power; the English Sovereign, now a prince of France, ere long on the French soil vied in magnitude of territory with his paramount Lord, the Monarch of France. Such a permanent connexion could not fail to produce a conformity in manners; what was passing among our closest neighbours, rivals or associates, was reflected in the old Saxon land which had lost its nationality.

THE PAGE, THE BARON, AND THE MINSTREL.

WHEN learning was solely ecclesiastical and scholastical, there were no preceptors for mankind. The monastery and the university were far removed from the sympathies of daily life; all knowledge was out of the reach of the layman. It was then that the energies of men formed a course of practical pursuits, a system of education of their own. The singular institution of chivalry rose out of a combination of circumstances where, rudeness and luxury mingling together, the utmost refinement was found compatible with barbaric grandeur, and holy justice with generous power. In lawless times they invented a single law which included a whole code—the law of knightly honour. *L'Ordenne de Chevalerie* is the morality of knighthood, and invests the aspirant with every moral and political virtue as every military qualification*.

* St. Palaye, to whom we owe the ideal of chivalry, has truly observed, "Toutes les vertus recommandées par la Chevalerie tournoient au bien public, au profit de l'Etat." It was when the causes of its institution ceased, and nothing remained but its forms without its motive, that altered manners could safely ridicule some noble qualities which though now displaced have not always found equal substitutes. In the advancement of society we may count some losses.

Destitute of a national education, the higher orders thus found a substitute in a conventional system of manners. Circumstances, perhaps originally accidental, became customs sealed with the sign of honour. In this moral chaos order marshalled confusion, as refinement adorned barbarism. A mighty spirit lay as it were in disguise, and it broke out in the forms of imagination, passion, and magnificence, seeking their objects or their semblance, and if sometimes mistaken, yet still laying the foundations of social order and national glory in Europe.

A regular course of practical pursuits was assigned to the future noble "childe" from the day that he left the parental roof for the baronial hall of his patron. In these "nurseries of nobility," as Jonson has well described such an institution, in his first charge as varlet or page, the boy of seven years was an attendant at the baron's table, and it was no humiliating office when the youth grew to be the carver and the cupbearer. He played on the viol or danced in the brawls till he was more gravely trained in "the mysteries of woods and rivers," the arts of the chase, and the sciences of the swanery, and the heronry, and the fishery; the springal cheerily sounded a blast of venery, or the falconer with his voice caressed his attentive hawk, which had not obeyed him had he neglected that daily flattery.

At fourteen the varlet became an esquire, vaulting on his fiery steed, and perfecting himself in all noble exercises, nicely adroit in the science of "courtesie," or the etiquette of the court; and already this "servant of love" was taught to elect *La dame de ses pensées*, and wore her favour and her livery for "the love of honour, or the honour of love," as Sir Philip Sydney in the style of chivalry expressed it.

At the maturity of twenty and one years the late varlet, and now the esquire, stood forth a candidate to blazon his shield by knighthood—the accomplished gentleman of these Gothic days, and right learned too, if he can con his bible and read his romance. Enchanting mirror of all chivalry! if he invent songs and set them to his own melodies. Yet will the gentle "batchelor" be dreaming on some gallant feat of arms, or some martial achievement, whereby "to win his spurs." On his solemn entrance into the church, laying his sword upon the altar, he resumed it by the oath which for ever bound him to defend the church and the churchmen. Thus all human affairs then were rounded by the ecclesiastical orbit, out of which no foot dared to stray. All began and all ended as the romances which formed his whole course of instruction—with the devotion which seemed to have been addressed to man as much as to Heaven.

After the termination of the Crusades, the grand incident in the life of the BARON was a pilgrimage to the holy city of Jerusalem; what the penitent of the cross had failed to conquer, it seemed a consolation to kneel at and to weep over: a custom not obsolete so late as the reigns of our last Henries; and still, though less publicly avowed, the melancholy Jerusalem witnesses the Hebrew and the Christian performing some secret vow, to grieve with a contrition which it seems they do not feel at home.

In these peregrinations a lordly Briton might chance to find some French or Italian knight as rash and as haughty; it was a law in chivalry that a knight should not give way to any man who demanded it as a right, nor decline the single combat with any knight under the sun; a challenge could not therefore be avoided. But a *pas d'armes* was not always a friendly invitation, for often under the guise of chivalry was concealed the national hostility of the parties.

But when no crusade nor pilgrimage in the East, nor predatory excursion in the West, nor even the blazonry of a tournament, which fed his eyes with a picture of battle, summoned to put on his mail-coat, how was the vacant Lord to wear out his monotonous days in his castle of indolence? The domestic fool stood beside him, archly sad, or gravely mirthful, as his master

willed, with a proverb or a quip; and with his licensed bauble was the most bitterly wisest man in the castle. Patron of the costly manuscript which he could not himself read, the romancer of his household awaited his call; the great then had fabulators or tale-tellers, as royalty has now, by title of their office—its readers. But this Lord was too vigorous for repose, and the tranquillity of chess was too trying for his brain; the chess-board was often broken about the head of some mute dependent, or perchance on one who returned the dagger for the board. There was little peace for his restlessness, when, weary in his seat, his priceless Norway hawk perched above his head*, and his idle hounds spread over the floor, ceaselessly reminded him of those wide and frowning forests which were continually encroaching on the tillage of the contemned agriculturist, offering a mimetic war, not only against the bird and the beast, but man himself: for the lairs of the forest concealed the deer he chased, and often the bandit who chased the Lord—the terrible Lord of this realm of wood and water, where whoever would fowl a bird or strike a buck might have his eyes torn from

* I recollect this trait in Chaucer. The Norway hawk was among the most valuable articles of property, valued at a sum equal to 300*l.* of the present day.—Nicholls, History of Leicestershire, xxxix.

their sockets, or on the spot of his offence mount the instant gallows *.

There was a disorderly grandeur about the castellated mansion which should have required the ukase of this Sovereign of many leagues, surrounded by many hundreds of his retainers; but rarely the cry of the oppressed was allowed to disturb the Lord, while all within were exact in their appointments, as clock-work movements which were wound up in the government of these immense domestic establishments. Great families had their "household-books," and in some the illegible hand of the lordly master himself, when the day arrived that even barons were incited to Scriptural attempts, may yet be seen †. These nobles, it appears, were more select in their falconer and their *chef de cuisine* than in their domestic tutor, for such there was among the retainers of the household. This humiliated sage indeed in his own person was a model for the young varlets, on

* The Norman William punished men with loss of eyes for taking his venery.—Selden's notes to Drayton's Polyolbion, Song ii.

An instant execution of two youths by the gamekeepers at the command of their Lord appears in an ancient romance recently published in France.—*Journal des Savans*, 1838.

† A curious specimen of these "Household Books," though of a later period, is that of the Northumberland family, printed by Bishop Percy. Many exist in manuscript, and contain particulars more valuable than the prices of commodities, for which they are usually valued; they offer striking pictures of the manners of their age.

whom it was his office to inculcate that patient suppleness and profound reverence for their Lord and their superiors, which seemed to form the single principle of their education. At this period we find a domestic proverb which evidently came from the buttery. As then eight or ten tables were to be daily covered, it is probable the chivalric epicures sometimes found their tastes disappointed by the culinary artists; it would seem that this put them into sudden outbreakings of ill-humour, for the proverb records that "the minstrels are often beaten for the faults of the cooks."

Too much leisure, too many loungers, and the tedium of prolonged banquets, a want of the pleasures of the luxurious sedentary would be as urgent as in ages more intellectual and refined; those pleasures in which we participate though we are passive, receiving the impressions without any exertion of our own—pleasures which make us delighted auditors or spectators. The theatre was not yet raised, but the listlessness of vacuity gave birth to all the variegated artists of revelry. If they had not comedy itself, they abounded with the comic, and without tragedy the tragic often moved their emotions. Nor were they even then without their scenical illusions, marvels which came and vanished, as the Tregetour clapped his hands—enchantments! which though Chaucer opined to be only

"natural magic," all the world tremblingly enjoyed as the work of devils; a sensation which we have totally lost in the necromancy of our pantomimes. And thus it was that in the illumed hall of the feudal Lord, we discover a whole dramatic company, which however dissimilar in their professional arts were all enlisted under the indefinite class of MINSTRELS; for in the domestic state of society we are now recalling, the poetic minstrel must be separated from those other minstrels of very different acquirements, with whom, however, he was associated.

There were ministrels who held honourable offices in the great households, sometimes chosen for their skill and elocution to perform the dignified service of heralds, and were in the secret confidence of their Lord; these were those favourites of the castle, whose guerdon was sometimes as romantic as any incident in their own romance.

No festival, public or private, but there the minstrel poet was its crowning ornament. They awakened national themes in the presence of assembled thousands at the installation of an abbot, or the reception of a bishop*. Often, in the Gothic hall, they resounded some lofty "Geste," or some old "Breton" lay, or with some gayer Fabliau, indulging the vein of an improvvisatore, alter-

* Warton, i. 94.

ing the old story when wanting a new one. Delightful rhapsodists, or amusing tale-tellers, combining the poetic with the musical character, they displayed the influence of the imagination over a rude and unlettered race;

——They tellen Tales
Both of WEEPYING and of GAME.

Chaucer has pourtrayed the rapture of a minstrel excited by his harp, a portrait evidently after the life.

Somewhat he *lisped* for his wantonness
To make the English swete upon his tonge;
And in his Harping when that he had songe,
His Eyen twinkled in his Hed aright,
As don the Sterrés in a frosty night.

The minstrel more particularly delighted "the Lewed," or the people, when, sitting in their fellowship, the harper stilled their attention by some fragment of a chronicle of their fathers and their father-land. The family harper touched more personal sympathies; the ancestral honours of the baron made even the vassal proud—domestic traditions and local incidents deepened their emotions—the moralising ditty softened their mind with thought, and every county had its legend at which the heart of the native beat. Of this minstrelsy little was written down, but tradition lives through a hundred echoes, and the "reliques of ancient English poetry," and the minstrelsy of the Scottish Border, and some

other remains, for the greater part have been formed by so many metrical narratives and fugitive effusions.

There were periods in which the minstrels were so highly favoured that they were more amply rewarded than the clergy;—a circumstance which induced Warton to observe with more truth than acuteness, that "in this age, as in more enlightened times, the people loved better to be pleased than to be instructed*." Such was their fascination and their passion for "Largesse!" that they were reproached with draining the treasury of a prince. It is certain that this thoughtless race have suffered from the evil eye of the monkish chroniclers, who looked on the minstrels as their rivals in sharing the prodigality of the great; yet even their monkish censors relented whenever these revellers appeared. It was a festive day among so many joyless ones when the minstrel band approached the lone monastery. Then the sweet-toned Vielle, or the merry Rebeck, echoed in the hermit-hearts of the slumbering inmates; vaulters came tumbling about, jugglers bewitched their eyes, and the grotesque Mime, who would not be outdone by his tutored ape. Then came the stately minstrel, with his harp, borne before him by his smiling page, usually called "The Minstrel's Boy."

* Warton, ii. 412.

One of the brotherhood has described the strolling troop who

> "Walken fer and wyde,
> Her, and ther, in every syde,
> In many a diverse londe."

The easy life of these ambulatory musicians, their ample gratuities, and certain privileges which the minstrels enjoyed both here and among our neighbours, corrupted their manners, and induced the dissipated and the reckless to claim those privileges by assuming their title. A disorderly rabble of minstrels crowded every public assembly, and haunted the private abode. At different periods the minstrels were banished the kingdom, in England and in France; but their return was rarely delayed. The people could not be made to abandon these versatile dispensers of solace, amid their own monotonous cares.

At different periods minstrels appear to have been persons of great wealth—a circumstance which we discover by their votive religious acts in the spirit and custom of those days. The priory of St. Bartholomew in Smithfield, in 1102, was founded by "Rahere," the king's minstrel, who is described as "a pleasant-witted gentleman," such as we may imagine a wealthy minstrel, and moreover "the king's," ever to have been *.

* Stowe's Survey by Strype, book iii. 235. We might wish to learn the authority of Stowe for ascribing this "pleasant wit" to

In St. Mary's church at Beverley in Yorkshire, stands a noble column covered with figures of minstrels, inscribed, "This Pillar made the Mynstrels;" and at Paris, a chapel dedicated to St. Julian of the Minstrels was erected by them, covered with figures of minstrels bearing all the instruments of music used in the middle ages, where the violin or fiddle is minutely sculptured †.

If in these ages of romance and romancers the fair sex were rarely approached without the devotion of idolatry, whenever "the course of true love" altered—when the frail spirit loved too late and should not have loved, the punishment became more criminal than the crime; for there was more of selfish revenge and terrific malignity than of justice, when autocratical man became the executioner of his own decree. The domestic chronicles of these times exhibit such harrowing incidents as those of *La Châtelaine de Vergy*, where suddenly a scene of immolation struck through the devoted

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Rahere of the eleventh century! As the pen of venerable Stowe never moved idly, our antiquary must have had some information which is now lost. "The king's minstrel" is also a doubtful designation: was the founder of this priory "a king of the minstrels?" an office which the French also had, *Roy des Ménéstraulx*, a governor instituted to keep order among all minstrels. Our Rahere, however "pleasant witted," seems to have fallen into penance for his "wit," for he became the first prior.

† *Antiquités Nationales*, par Millin, xli. Two plates exhibit this Gothic chapel and the various musical instruments.

household; or that of La Dame du Fayel *, who was made to eat her lover's heart. And those who had not to punish, but to put to trial, the affections of women who were in their power, had their terrible caprices, a ferocity in their barbarous loves. Year after year the Gothic lord failed to subdue the immortalised patience of Griselda, and such was our "Childe Waters," who put to such trials of passion, physical and mental, the maiden almost a mother. In the fourteenth century, one century later than the histories of the "*Châtelaine*" and the "*Dame*," either the female character was sometimes utterly dissolute, or the tyranny of husbands utterly reckless, when we find that it was no uncommon circumstance that women were strangled by masked

* Both these romantic tales may be considered as authentic narratives though they have often been used by the writers of fiction. *La Châtelaine de Vergy* has been sometimes confounded with *Le Châtelain de Coucy*, the lover of *La Dame du Fayel*. The story of the Countess of Vergy (on which a romance of the thirteenth century is founded, Hist. Litt. de France, xviii. 779) has been a favourite with the tale-tellers—the Queen of Navarre, Bandello, and Belle Forest, and is elegantly versified in the "Fabliaux, or Tales," of Way. That of the Dame du Fayel, one of the fathers of French literary history, old Fauchet, extracted it from a good old chronicle dated two centuries before he wrote. The story is also found in an ancient romance of the thirteenth century in the Royal Library of France.—Hist. Litt. de la France, xiv. 579; xvii. 644. The story of Childe Waters in Percy's Collection has all the pathetic simplicity of ancient minstrelsy, which is more forcibly felt when we compare it with the rifaccimento by a Mrs. Pye, in Evans's Old Ballads.

assassins, or walking by the river-side, were plunged into it. This drowning of women gave rise to a popular proverb—"It is nothing! only a woman being drowned." La Fontaine, probably without being aware of this allusion to a practice of the fourteenth century, has preserved the proverbial phrase in his "La Femme noyée," beginning

> "Je ne suis pas de ceux qui disent ce n'est rien,
> C'est une Femme qui se noye!*"

The personages and the manners here imperfectly sketched, constituted the domestic life of our chivalric society from the twelve century to the first civil wars of England. In this long interval few could read; even bishops could not always write, and the Gothic baron pleaded the privilege of a layman for not doing the one nor the other.

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* Montaigne was so well acquainted with this practice, that he has used it as a familiar illustration of the obstinacy of some women —which I suppose the good man imagined could not be paralleled by instances from the masculine sex; however, his language must not be disguised by a modern version. "Celui qui forgea le conte de la femme qui, pour aucune correction de ménaces et bastonnades, ne cessait d'appeler son mari, Pouilleux, et qui, précipité dans l'eau, haussoit encore, en s'étouffant, les mains et faisoit au-dessus de sa tête signe de tuer des poux, forgea un conte duquel en vérité tous les jours on voit l'image expresse de l'opiniâtreté des femmes."

The punishment of our "Ducking-stool" for female brawlers possibly originated in this medieval practice of throwing women into the river: but this is but an innocuous baptism, while we find the obstinate wife here, who probably spoke true enough, *s'étouffant*,—merely for correcting the filthy lubbard, her lord and master.

The intellectual character of the nation can only be traced in the wandering minstrel and the haughty ecclesiastic. The minstrel mingling with all the classes of society reflected all their sympathies, and in reality was one of the people themselves; but the ecclesiastic stood apart, too sacred to be touched, while his very language was not that either of the noble or of the people.

A dense superstition overshadowed the land from the time of the first crusade to the last. It may be doubtful whether there was a single Christian in all Christendom, for a new sort of idolatry was introduced in shrines, and relics, and masses; holy wells, awful exorcisms, saintly vigils, month's minds, pilgrimages afar and penances at home; lamp-lighting before shrines decked with golden images, and hung with votive arms and legs of cripples who recovered from their rheumatic ails. The enthusiasm for the figure of the cross conferred a less pure sanctity on that memorial of pious tribulation. Everywhere it was placed before them. The crusader wore that sign on his right shoulder, and when his image lay extended on his tomb, the crossed legs were reverently contemplated. They made the sign of the cross by the motion of their hand, in peril or in pleasure, in sorrow and in sin, and expected no happy issue in an adventure without frequently signing them-

selves with the cross. The cross was placed at the beginning and at the end of their writings and inscriptions, and it opened and closed the alphabet. The mystical virtues of the cross were the incessant theme of the Monachal Orders, and it was kissed in rapture on the venal indulgence expedited by the papal Hierophant. As even in sacred things novelty and fashion will perversely put in their claim, we find the writers and the sculptors varying the appearance of the cross; its simple form ✠ became inclosed in a circle ⊕, and again varied by dots ⁜*. The guardian cross protected a locality, and in England, at the origin of parishes, the cross stood as the hallowed witness which marked the boundaries, and which it had been sacrilege to disturb. It was no unusual practice to place the sign at the head of private letters, however trivial the contents, as we find it in charters and other public documents. In one of the Paston letters, the piety of the writer at a much later period could not detail the ordinary occurrences of the week without inserting the sacred letters I.H.S.; and similar invocations are found in others.†

The material symbol of Christianity had thus been indiscriminately adopted without conveying with it the virtues of the gospel. The cross was a myth—the

* Leland's Itinerary, ii. 126. † Paston's Letters, v. 17.

cross was, the *Fetish** of an idolatrous Christianity—they bowed before it, they knelt to it, they kissed it, they kissed a palpable and visible deity; never was the Divinity rendered more familiar to the gross understandings of the vulgar; and in these ages of unchristian Christianity, the cross was degraded even to a vulgar mark, which conveniently served for the signature of some unlettered baron.

* See the very curious chapter on the *Fetish worship*, in that very original and learned work "The Doctor," v. 133.

GOTHIC ROMANCES.

A NEW species of literature arose in the progress of that practical education which society had assumed; a literature addressed to the passions which rose out of the circumstances of the times; dedicated to war, to love, and to religion, when the business of life seemed restricted to the extreme indulgence of those ennobling pursuits. In too much love, too much war, too much devotion, it was not imagined that knights and ladies could ever err. If sometimes the loves were utterly licentious, wondrous tales are told of their immaculate purity; if their religion were then darkened by the grossest superstition, their faith was genuine, and would have endured martyrdom; and if the chivalric valour often exulted in its ferocity and its rapacity, its generous honour amid a lawless state of society maintained justice in the land, by the lance which struck the oppressor, and by the shield which covered the helpless.

Everything had assumed a more extended form: the pageantry of society had varied and multiplied; the banquet was prolonged; the festival day was frequent; the ballad narrative, or the spontaneous lyric, which had sufficed their ruder ancestors to allure attention, now

demanded, more volume and more variety; the romance with a deeper interest was to revolve in the entangling narrative of many thousand lines. There was a traditional store, a stock of fabling in hand, heroical panegyrics, satirical songs, and legendary ballads; all served as the stuff for the looms of mightier weavers of rhyme, whose predecessors had left them this inheritance. The marvellous of Romance burst forth, and this stupendous fabric of invention bewitched Europe during three centuries.

Romance, from the light fabliau to the voluminous fiction, has admitted, in the luxury of our knowledge and curiosity, not only of critical investigation, but of its invention, by tracing it to a single source. The origin of Romance has been made to hinge on a theoretical history; and by maintaining exclusive systems, mostly fanciful and partly true, it has been made complicate. Whether invention in the form of Romance came from the oriental tale-teller or the Scandinavian Scald, or whether the fictions of Europe be the growth of the Provençal or the Armorican soil, our learned inquirers have each told; nor have they failed in considerably diminishing the claims of each particular system opposed to their own; but the greatest error will be found in their mutual refutations.* While each

* Warton and Percy, Ritson and Leyden, Ellis and Turner and Price, and recently the late Abbé de la Rue.

stood entrenched in an exclusive system, they were only furnishing an integral portion of a boundless and complicate inquiry. They scrutinised with microscopic eyes into that vast fabric of invention, which the Gothic genius may proudly oppose to the fictions of antiquity, and they seemed at times forgetful of the vicissitudes which, at distant intervals, and by novel circumstances, enlarged and modified the changeful state of romantic fiction among every people.

In the attempt to retrace the Nile of Romance to a solitary source, in the eagerness of their discoveries they had not yet ascertained that this Nile bears many far-divided heads, and some from which Time shall never remove its clouds; for who dares assign an origin to the ancient Milesian tales, the tales and their origin being alike lost *?

Warton, encumbered by his theory of an Eastern origin, opened the map to track the voyage of an

* A profound and poetic genius has thrown out a new suggestion on the origin of these Eastern tales. "I think it not unlikely that the *Milesian Tales* contained the germs of many of those *now in the Arabian Nights*. The Greek empire must have left deep impressions on the Persian intellect—so also many of the Roman Catholic *Legends* are taken from *Apuleius*. The exquisite story of Cupid and Psyche is evidently a philosophical attempt to parry Christianity with a quasi Platonic account of the fall and redemption of man."—Coleridge's Literary Remains, i. 180. Whatever were these Milesian Tales, they amused the Grecian sages in the earliest period of their history.

Arabian tale: he landed it at Marseilles, that port by which ancient Greece first held its intercourse with our Europe, and thence the tale was sent forwards through genial Italy, but forced to harbour in this voyage of Romance at the distant shores of Brittany, that land of Romance and of the ancient Briton. The result of his system startled the literary world by his assumption, that "the British history" of Geoffry of Monmouth entirely consists of Arabian inventions! the real source of the airy existence of our British Arthur! Bishop Percy had been nearly as adventurous in his Gothic origin, by landing a number of the northern bards with the army of Rollo in Normandy; an event which contributed to infuse the Scaldic genius into the romances of chivalry, whose national hero is Charlemagne—the tutelary genius of France and Germany.

They had looked to the east, and to the north—and wherever they looked for the origin of Romance it was found. They had sought in a corner of the universe for that which is universal.

ROMANCE sprang to birth in every clime, native wherever she is found, notwithstanding that she has been a wanderer among all lands, and as prodigal a dispenser as she has been free in her borrowings and artful in her concealments.

The art of fabling may be classed among the mimetic

arts—it is an aptitude of the universal and plastic faculties of our nature; and man might not be ill defined and charactered as "a mimetic and fabling animal."

The earliest Romances appear in a metrical form about the middle of the twelfth century. The first were "Estoires," or pretended chronicles, like that of the Brut of Wace; the Romances of martial achievement then predominated, those of the Knights of Arthur, and the Paladins of Charlemagne; the adventures of love and gallantry were of a later epoch. In the mutability of taste an extraordinary transition occurred; after nearly two centuries passed in rhyming, all the verse was to be turned into prose. Whether voluminous rhymes satiate the public ear, or novelty in the form was sought even when they had but little choice, the writers of Romance, a very flexible gentry, who of all other writers servilely accommodate themselves to the public taste, with more fluent pens loitered into a more ample page; or, as they expressed themselves, "translatés de rime en prose," or "mis en beau langage." Many of the old French metrical Romances, in the fourteenth century, were disguised in this humbled form; but their "mensogne magnanime," to use Tasso's style, who loved them, lost nothing in number or in hardihood. On the discovery of the typographic art, in the fifteenth century, many of these

prose Romances in manuscript received a new life by passing through the press; and these, in their venerable "lettres Gothiques," are still hoarded for the solace of the curious in fictions of genuine antiquity, and of invention in its prime, both at home and abroad; and in a reduced form we find them surviving among the people on the Continent. It is singular that the metrical Romances seem never to have received the honours conferred on the prose*.

These Romances, in their manuscript state, were cherished objects †; the mighty tomes, sometimes consisting of forty or fifty thousand lines, described as those "great books of parchment," or "the great book of Romances," were usually embellished by the pen and the pencil with every ornament that fancy could suggest; bound in crimson velvet, guarded by clasps of silver, and studded with golden roses; profuse of gorgeous illuminations, and decorated with the most delicate miniatures, "lymned with gold

* Ritson and Weber have elegantly printed some of the best English metrical Romances. In France they have recently enriched literature with many of these manuscript Romances. See Gentleman's Magazine, Oct. 1839.

† It is a curious fact, that in 1390 Sir James Douglas of Dalkeith, the ancestor of the Earl of Morton, apparently valued them as about equal to the statutes of the realm; for he bequeathed in his will to his son, "Omnes libros meos tam *Statutorum* Regni Scocie quam *Romancie*."—Laing's Early Metrical Tales, Edinburgh, 1826.

of graver's work" on an azure ground; or the purple page setting off the silvery letters;—objects then of perpetual attraction to the story-believing reader, and which now charm the eye which could not as patiently con the endless page. The fashions of the times are exactly shown in the dresses and the domestic furniture; as well as their instruments, military and musical.

Studies for the artist as for the curious antiquary*, we may view the plumage in a casque curved and falling with peculiar grace, and a lady's robe floating in its amplitude; and ornaments of dress arranged, which our taste might emulate. A French amateur who possessed *le Roman de la Violette*, a romance of a fabulous Count of Nevers, was so deeply struck by its exquisite and faithful miniatures, that he employed the best artists to copy the most interesting, and placed them in his collection of the costume and fashions of the French nation; a collection preserved in the Royal Library of France†. If their hard outline does not always flow into grace, their imagination worked under

* A collection of these Romances formed into three folio tomes in manuscript was enriched by seven hundred and forty-seven miniatures, *avec les Initiales peintes en or et couleurs.* 6093, Roxburgh Cat.

† Cat. of the Duke de la Valliere, 4507. Strutt would have done as much for ourselves, but he worked in unrequited solitude with all the passion of the French amateur, but without his "best artists."

the mysterious influence of the Romance through all their devoted labour. In a group of figures we may observe that the heads are not mechanically cast by one mould, but the distinct character looks as if the thoughtful artist had worked out his recollections on which he had meditated. In some of the heads, portraits of distinguished persons have been recognised. Not less observable are the arabesques often found on the margins, where the playful pencil has prodigally flung flowers and fruit, imitating the bloom, or insects which look as if they had lighted on the leaf. These margins, however, occasionally exhibit arabesques of a very different character; figures or subjects which often amused the pencil of the monastic limners, satirical strokes aimed at their brothers and sisters—the monks and the nuns! I have observed a wolf, in a monk's frock and cowl, stretching its paw to bless a cock bending its submissive head; a cat, in the habit of an abbess, holding a platter in its paws to a mouse approaching to lick it, alluding to the allurements of abbesses to draw young women into their convents; and a sow, in a nun's veil, mounted on stilts. A pope appears to be thrown by devils into a cauldron, and cardinals are roasting on spits. All these expressions of suppressed opinion must have been executed by the monks themselves. These reformers before the Re-

formation sympathised with the popular feeling against the haughty prelate and the luxurious abbot.

The great Romance of Alexander, preserved in the Bodleian Library, reveals a secret of the cost of time freely bestowed on that single and mighty tome. The illuminator, by preserving the date when he had completed his own work compared with that of the transcriber when he had finished his part, appears to have employed nearly six years on the paintings which embellish this precious volume*.

Such a metrical Romance was a gift presented to royalty, when engrossed by the rapturous hand of the Romancer himself; the autograph, in a presentation copy, might count on the meed of "massy goblets" when the munificent patron found the new volume delectable to his taste, which indeed had been anticipated by the writer. This incident occurred to Froissart in presenting his Romance to Richard the Second, when, in reply to his majesty's inquiry after the contents, the author exultingly told that "the book treated of Amour!"

To the writers of these ancient Romances we cannot deny a copious invention, a variegated imagination,

* This Romance was composed about the year 1200; the present copy was made in 1338. There is also a splendid manuscript with rich and delicate illuminations of the ancient Romance of Alexander in prose in the Brit. Mus., Bib. Reg. 15, E. 6.

and, among their rambling exuberances and their grotesque marvels, those enchanting enchantments which the Greeks and Romans only partially and coldly raised. We may often, too, discover that truth of human nature which is not always supposed to lie hid in these desultory compositions. Amid their peculiar extravagances, which at least may serve to raise an occasional smile, the strokes of nature are abundant, and may still form the studies of the writers of fiction, however they may hang on the impatience of the writers and the readers of our duodecimos. Ancient writers are pictorial: their very fault contributes to produce a remarkable effect—a fulness often overflowing, but which at least is not a scantiness leaving the vagueness of imperfect description. Their details are more circumstantial, their impressions are more vivid, and they often tell their story with the earnestness of persons who had conversed with the actors, or had been spectators of the scene. We may be wearied, as one might be at a protracted trial by the witnesses, but we are often struck by an energetic reality which we sometimes miss in their polished successors. Their copiousness indeed is without selection; they wrote before they were critics, but their truth is not the less truth because it is given with little art.

The dilations of the metrical Romances into tomes of

prose, Warton considered as a proof of the decay of invention. Was not this censure rather the feeling of a poet for his art, than the decision of a critic? for the more extended scenes of the Romances in prose required a wider stage, admitted of a fuller dramatic effect in the incidents, and a more perfect delineation of the personages through a more sustained action. If the prose Romances are not epics by the conventional code of the Stagyrite, at least they are epical; and some rude Homers sleep among these old Romancers, metrical or prosaic. A living poetic critic, one best skilled to arbitrate, for he is without any prepossessions in favour of our ancient writers, has honestly acknowledged their faithfulness to nature in their touching simplicity; "nor," he adds, "do they less afford, by their bolder imagination, adequate subjects for the historical pencil." And he has more particularly noticed "Le bone Florence de Rome,"—thus written by our ungrammatical minstrels. "Classical poetry has scarcely ever conveyed in shorter boundaries so many interesting and complicated events as may be found in this good old Romance*." This indeed is so true, that we find these romantic tales were not only recited or read, but their subjects were worked into the tapestries which covered the walls of their apartments. The Bible and the

* Campbell's Essay on English Poetry.

Romance equally offered subjects to eyes learned in the "Estoires" never to be forgotten.

Our master poets have drawn their waters from these ancient fountains. SIDNEY might have been himself one of their heroes, and was no unworthy rival of his masters: SPENSER borrowed largely, and repaid with munificence: MILTON in his loftiest theme looked down with admiration on this terrestrial race,

——— "and what resounds
In fable or romance of Uther's son,
Begirt with British or Armoric knights."

"In Amadis of Gaul," has said our true laureate, "may be found the Zelmane of the Arcadia, the Masque of Cupid of the Faery Queen, and the Florizel of the Winter's Tale. Sidney, Spenser, and Shakespeare imitated this book: was ever book honoured by three such imitators*?"

* Our vernacular literature owes to the unremitting ardour of our laureate recent editions of *La Morte d'Arthur*, *Palmerin of England*, and a new translation from the Portuguese of *Amadis of Gaul*. For readers who are not antiquaries and who may recoil from the prolixity of the ancient Romances, there is a work of their species which may amply gratify their curiosity, and it is of easy acquisition. It is not an unskilful compilation from the Romances of chivalry made by RICHARD JOHNSON, a noted bookwright in the reign of Elizabeth; it has passed through innumerable editions, and has at last taken its station in the popular library of our juvenile literature. I suspect that the style has been too often altered in the modern editions, which has injured its raciness. It is well known as "The Renowned History of the Seven Champions of Christendom." The compiler has

A great similarity is observable among these writers of fiction, both in their incidents and the identity of their phrases; an evidence that these inventors were often drawing from a common source. In these ages of manuscripts they practised without scruple many artifices, and might safely appropriate the happiest passages of their anonymous brothers*. One Romance

metamorphosed the Rowland, Oliver, Guy, Bevis, &c., into seven saints or champions of Christendom; but "he has preserved some of the most capital fictions of the old Arabian Romance."—Warton, iii. 63. Ed. 8vo. It may serve as a substitute for the old black-letter Romances, being a compendium of their rich or their grotesque fancies; or, as Ritson observes with his accustomed energetical criticism, "It is a compound of superstition, and, as it were, all the lyes in Christendom in one lye, and is in many parts of the country believed at this day to be as true as the gospel."—Dissertation on Romance, xxxiv.

* One of the most celebrated romantic histories is "the Troy-book of Guido delle Colonne," which has been considered as the original of all the later tales of Troy. On the acute suggestion of Tyrwhit, Douce ascertained that this fabulous history, by many regarded as original, is only a Latin translation of a Norman poet[1], which Guido passes off as a history collected from Dares and other fictitious authorities, but disingenuously conceals the name of Benoit de Saint Maur, whose works he appears to have found when he came to England. It was a prevalent practice in the middle ages, to appropriate a work by a cautious suppression of any mention of the original. Tiraboschi might now be satisfied that Guido delle Colonne was in England, which he doubted, since he now stands charged with only turning into Latin prose the poem of a Norman, that is, an English poet at the court of our Henry the Second.

[1] Douce's Illustrations of Shakspeare.

would produce many by variations; the same story would serve as the ground-work of another; and the later Romancer, to set at rest the scruples of the reader, usually found fault with his predecessors who, having written the same story, had not given "the true one!" By this innocent imposture, or this ingenious impudence, they designed to confer on their Romance the dignity of History. The metrical Romances pretend to translate some ancient "Cronik" which might be consulted at Caerleon, the magical palace of the vanished Arthur; or they give their own original Romance as from some "Latyn auctour," whose name is cautiously withheld; or they practise other devices, pretending to have drawn their work from "the Greek," or "the English," and even from an "unknown language." In some Colophons of the prose Romances the names of real persons are assigned as the writers*; but the same Romance is equally ascribed to different persons, and works are given as translations which in fact are originals. Amid this prevailing confusion, and these contradictory statements, we must agree with the editor of Warton, that we cannot

* In the curious catalogue of these Romances in the Roxburgh Library, the cataloguer announced three or four of these pretended authors as "names unknown to any literary historians," and considered the announcement a literary discovery.

with any confidence name the author of any of these prose Romances. RITSON has aptly treated these pseudonymous translators as "men of straw." We may say of them all as the antiquary DOUCE, in the agony of his baffled researches after one of their favourite authorities, a Will o' the Wisp named Lollius, exclaimed, somewhat gravely—"Of Lollius it will become every one to speak with diffidence." Ariosto seems to have caught this bantering humour of mystifying his readers in his own Gothic Romance, gravely referring his extravagances to "the Chronicle of the pseudo Archbishop Turpin" for his voucher! What was with the Italian but a playful stroke of satire on the pretended verity of Turpin himself, may have covered a more serious design with these ancient romance-writers. Père Menestrier ascribed these productions to Heralds, who, he says, were always selected for their talents, their knowledge, and their experience; qualifications not the most essential for Romance-writing. "According to the bad taste of those ignorant ages," he proceeds, "it is from them so many Romances on feats of arms and of chivalry issued, by which they designed to elevate their own office, and to celebrate their voyages in different lands *." St. Palaye, in

* Père Menestrier, Chevalerie Ancienne et Moderne, chap. v. on HERALDS.

adopting this notion of these Heraldical Romancers, with more knowledge of the ancient Romances than the good Father possessed, has added a more numerous body, the *Trouvères*, who, either in rehearsing or in composing these poetical narratives, might urge a stronger claim.

When Père Menestrier imagined that it was the intention of these Heralds, by these Romances, "to celebrate their voyages in different lands," it seems to have escaped him that "the voyages" of these Romancers to the visionary Caerleon, to England or to Macedonia, were but a geography of Fairy Land.

In the history of Literature we here discover a whole generation of writers, who, so far from claiming the honour of their inventions, or aspiring after the meed of fame, have even studiedly concealed their claims, and, with a modesty and caution difficult to comprehend, dropped into their graves without a solitary commemoration.

These idling works of idlers must have been the pleasant productions of persons of great leisure, with some tincture of literature, and to whom, by the peculiarity of their condition, fame was an absolute nullity. Who were these writers who thus contemned fame? Who pursued the delicate tasks of the illuminator and the calligrapher? Who adorned Psalters with a religious patience, and expended a whole month in con-

triving the vignette of an initial letter? Who were these artists who worked for no gain? In those ages the ecclesiastics were the only persons who answer to this character; and it would only be in the silence and leisure of the monastery that such imaginative genius and such refined art could find their dwelling-place. I have sometimes thought that it was Père Hardouin's conviction of all this literary industry of the monks which led him to indulge his extravagant conjecture, that the classical writings of antiquity were the fabrications of this sedentary brotherhood; and his "pseudo-Virgilius" and "pseudo-Horatius" astonished the world, though they provoked its laughter.

The Gothic mediæval periods were ages of imagination, when in art works of amazing magnitude were produced, while the artists sent down no claims to posterity. We know not who were the numerous writers of these voluminous Romances, but, what is far more surprising, we are nearly as unacquainted with those great and original architects who covered our land with the palatial monastery, the church, and the cathedral. In the religious societies themselves the genius of the Gothic architect was found: the bishop or the abbot planned while they opened their treasury; and the sculptor and the workmen were the tenants of the religious house. The devotion of labour and of

faith raised these wonders, while it placed them beyond the unvalued glory which the world can give*.

We cannot think less than Père Hardouin that there were no poetical and imaginative monks—Homers in cowls, and Virgils who chaunted vespers—who could compose in their unoccupied day more beautiful Romances than their crude legends, or the dry annals of the Leiger book of their abbey. Some knowledge these writers had of the mythological, and even the Homeric and Virgilian fictions, for they often gave duplicates of the classical fables of antiquity. Circe was a fair sorceress, the one-eyed Polyphemus a dread giant, and Perseus bestrode a winged dragon, before they were reflected in Romances. But what we discover peculiar in these works is a strange mixture of sacred and profane matters, always treated in a manner which scents of the cloister. Before he enters the combat, the knight is often on his knees, invoking his patron-saint; he proffers his vows on holy relics; while ladies placed in the last peril, or the most delicate positions, by their fervent repetitions of the sign of the Cross, or a vow to found an abbey, are as certainly saved: and for another refined stroke of the monachal invention, the heroes often close their career in a monastery or a hermitage. The monkish morality which sat loosely

* See Bentham's History and Antiquities of Ely, 27.

about them was, however, rigid in its ceremonial discipline. Lancelot de Lac leaves the bed of the guilty Genevra, the Queen of the good King Arthur, at the ring of the matin-bell, to assist at mass; so scrupulous were such writers that even in criminal levities they should not neglect all the offices of the church. The subject of one of these great Romances is a search after the cup which held the real blood of Christ; and this history of the *Sang-real* forms a series of Romances. Who but a monk would have thought, and even dared to have written it down, that all the circumstances in this Romance were not only certain, but were originally set down by the hand of Jesus himself? and further dared to observe, that Jesus never wrote but twice before—the Lord's Prayer, and the sentence on the woman taken in adultery. Such a pious, or blasphemous fraud, was not unusual among the dark fancies of the Monastic Legendaries.

Some of these Homers must have left their lengthening Iliad, as Homer himself seems to have done, unfinished; tired, or tiring, for no doubt there was often a rehearsal, "the tale half told" was resumed by some Elisha who caught the mantle his more inspired predecessor had let fall. It appears evident that several were the continuators of a favourite Romance; and from deficient attention or deficient skill a fatal

discrepancy has been detected in the identical characters—the ordinary fate of those who write after the ideas of another, with indistinct conceptions, or with fancies going contrary to those of the first inventor.

These metrical Romances in manuscript, and the printed prose in their original editions, are now very costly. By the antiquary and the poet these tomes may be often opened. With the antiquary they have served as the veritable registers of their ages. The French antiquaries, and Carte in England, have often illustrated by those ancient Romances many obscure points in geography and history. Except in the mere machinery of their fancy, these writers had no motive to pervert leading facts, for these served to give a colour of authenticity to their pretended history, or to fix their locality. As they had not the erudition to display, nor were aware of the propriety of copying, the customs and manners of the age of their legendary hero, they have faithfully transmitted their own; we should never have had but for this lucky absurdity the "Tale of Thebes" turned into a story of the middle ages; while Alexander the Great is but the ideal of a Norman baron in the splendour and altitude of the conception of the writers. It was the ignorance of the illuminators of our Latin and Saxon manuscripts of any other country than their own, which enabled STRUTT to place before the eye a pic-

torial exhibition of our Anglo-Saxon fathers. Compared with the realities of these originals, with all their faults of tediousness, the modern copiers of ancient times, in their mock scenes of other ages, too often reflect in the cold moonlight of their fancy a shadowy unsubstantial antiquity.

The influence of these fabulous achievements of unconquerable heroes and of soul-devoted lovers over the intellect and the passions of men and women, during that vast interval of time when they formed the sole literature, was omnipotent. In the early Romances of chivalry, when their genius was purely military, and directed to kindle a passion for joining the crusades, we rarely find adventures of the tender passion; but, since women cannot endure neglect, and the female character has all the pliancy of sympathy, and has performed her part in every age on the theatre of society, we discover the extraordinary fact that many ladies assumed the plumy helmet and dexterously managed the lance. The ladies rode amid armed knights resistless as themselves. It was subsequently, when we find that singularly fantastic institution of "The Courts of Love" which delivered their "Arrets" in the style of a most refined jurisprudence, that these beautiful companions at arms were satisfied to conquer the conquerors by more legitimate seductions, and that the Romances

told of little but of loves. Ariosto and Tasso are supposed to have drawn their female warriors from the Amazonian Penthesilea and the Camilla of Homer and Virgil; but it would seem that the prototype of these feminine knights these poets also found among those old Romances which they loved.

It is unquestionable that these martial Romances of chivalry, inflamed the restlessness of those numerous military adventurers who found an ample field for their chivalry after the crusades, in our continued incursions into France, of which country we were long a living plague, from the reign of Edward III. to that of Henry V., nearly a century of national tribulation. Many "a gentyl and noble esquyer," if perchance the English monarch held a truce with France or Scotland, flew into some foreign service. Sir Robert Knolles was known to the French as "le véritable démon de la guerre;" and Sir John Hawkwood, when there was no fighting to be got at home, passed over into Italy, where he approved himself to be such a prodigy of "a man-at-arms" that the grateful Florentines raised his statue in their cathedral; this image of English valour may still be proudly viewed. This chivalric race of Romance-readers were not, however, always of the purest "order of chivalry." If they were eager for enterprise, they were not less for its more prudential results. A castle or a

ransom in France, a lordly marriage or a domain in Italy, were the lees that lie at the bottom of their glory.

We continued long in this mixed state of glory clouded with barbarism; for at a time when literature and the fine arts were on the point of breaking out into the splendour of the pontificate of Leo the Tenth, in our own country, the great Duke of Buckingham, about 1500, held the old romance of "The Knight of the Swan" in the highest estimation, because the translator maintained that our duke was lineally descended from that hero; the first peer of the realm was proud of deriving his pedigree from a fabulous knight in a romantic genealogy.

But all the inventions and fashions of man have their date and their termination. For three centuries these ancient Romances, metrical or prose, had formed the reading of the few who read, and entranced the circle of eager listeners. The enchantment was on the wane; their admirers had become somewhat sceptical of "the true history" which had been so solemnly warranted; another taste in the more chastened writings of Roman and Grecian lore was now on the ascendant. One last effort was made in this decline of romantic literature, in that tesselated compilement where the mottled pieces drawn out of the French prose romances of chivalry were finely squared together by no unskilful work-

man, in Sir THOMAS MALORY, to the English lover of ancient romance well known by the title of *La Morte d'Arthur*. This last of these ancient Romances was finished in the ninth year of the reign of Edward IV., about 1470. CAXTON exulted to print this epical Romance; and at the same time he had the satisfaction of reproaching the "laggard" age. "What do ye now," exclaimed the ancient printer, "but go to the *Bagnes*, and play at dice? Leave this! leave it! and read these noble volumes." Volumes which not many years after, when a new system of affairs had occurred to supplant this long-idolised "order of chivalry, ROGER ASCHAM plainly asserted only taught "open manslaughter and bold bawdry." Such was the final fate of Love and Arms!

ORIGIN OF THE VERNACULAR LANGUAGES OF EUROPE.

THE predominance of the Latin language, during many centuries, retarded the cultivation of the vernacular dialects of Europe. When the barbarous nations had triumphed over ancient Rome, the language of the Latins remained unconquered; that language had diffused itself with the universal dominion, and, living in the minds of men, required neither legions nor consuls to maintain its predominance.

From accident, and even from necessity, the swarming hordes, some of whom seem to have spoken a language which had never been written, and were a roving people at a period prior to historical record, had adopted that single colloquial idiom which their masters had conveyed to them, attracted, if not by its beauty, at least by its convenience. This vulgar Latin was not, indeed, the Latin of the great writers of antiquity; but in its corrupt state, freed from a complex construction, and even from grammar, had more easily lent itself to the jargon of the ruder people. Teutonic terms, or Celtic words with corrupt latinisms, were called "the scum of ancient eloquence, and the rust of vulgar barba-

risms," by an indignant critic in the middle of the fifth century *. It was amid this confusion of races, of idioms, and of customs, that from this heterogeneous mass were hewed out those VERNACULAR DIALECTS of Europe which furnished each people with their own idiom, and which are now distinguished as the MODERN LANGUAGES.

In this transference and transfusion of languages, Italy retained the sonorous termination of her paternal soil, and Spain did not forget the majesty of the Latin accent; lands favoured by more genial skies, and men blessed with more flexible organs. But the Gothic and the Northern races barbarously abbreviated or disfigured their Latin words; to sounds so new to them they gave their own rude inflections; there is but one organ to regulate the delicacy of orthoepy—a musical and a tutored ear. The Gaul †, in cutting his words down,

* Sidonius Apollinaris.

† An ingenious literary antiquary has given us a copious vocabulary, as complete evidence of Latin words merely abbreviated by omitting their terminations, whence originated those numerous monosyllables which impoverish the French language. In the following instances the Gauls only used the first syllable for the entire word, damnum—*damn;* aureum—*or;* malum—*mal;* nudum—*nud;* amicus—*ami;* vinum—*vin;* homo—*hom*, as anciently written; curtus—*court;* sonus—*son;* bonus—*bon;* and thus man others.

The nasal sound of our neighbours still prevails; thus Gracchus

contracted a nasal sharpness; and the Northmen, in the shock of their hard, redundant consonants, lost the vowelly confluence.

This vulgar or corrupt Latin, mingled with this diversity of jargons, was the vitiated mother of the sister-languages of Europe; sisters still bearing their family likeness, of the same homely origin, but of various fortunes, till some attained to the beauty and affluence of their Latin line. From the first the people themselves had dignified their spurious generation of language as *Romans*, or *Romance*, or *Romaunt*, still proud perhaps of its Roman source; but the critical Latins themselves had distinguished it as *Rustic*, to indicate a base dialect used only by those who were far removed from the metropolis of the world.

But when these different nations had established their separate independence, this vernacular idiom was wholly left to the people; it was the image of their own barbaric condition, unworthy of the studies, and inadequate to the genius, of any writer. The universal language maintained its pre-eminence over the particular dialect, and as the course of human events succeeded, in the overwhelming of ancient Rome another Rome shadowed

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sinks into *Gracque;* Titus Livius is but *Tite Live;* and the historian of Alexander the Great, the dignified Quintus Curtius, is the ludicrous *Quinte Curce !—Auguis, du Génie de la Langue Françoise.*

the world. Ecclesiastical Rome, whence the novel faith of Christianity was now to emanate, far more potent than military Rome, perpetuated the ancient language. The clergy through the diversified realms of Europe were held together in strict conformity, and by a common bond chained to the throne of the priesthood—one faith, one discipline, one language!

The Latin tongue, both in verse and prose, was domiciliated among people of the most opposite interests, customs, and characters. The primitive fathers, the later schoolmen, the monkish chroniclers, all alike composed in Latin; all legal instruments, even marriage-contracts, were drawn in Latin: and even the language of Christian prayer was that of abolished paganism.

The idiom of their father-land—or as we have affectionately called it, our "mother-tongue," and as our ancient translator of the Polychronicon energetically terms it, "the birth-tongue"—those first human accents which their infant ear had caught, and which from their boyhood were associated with the most tender and joyous recollections, every nation left to fluctuate on the lips of the populace, rude and neglected. Whenever a writer, proposing to inform the people on subjects which more nearly interested them, composed in the national idiom, it was a strong impulse only which could induce him thus to submit to degrade his genius. One of the

French crusaders, a learned knight, was anxious that the nation should become acquainted with the great achievements of the deliverers of Jerusalem; it was the command of his bishop that induced him to compose the narrative in the vernacular idiom; but the twelve years which he bestowed on his chronicle were not considered by him as employed for his glory, for he avows that the humiliating style which he had used was the mortifying performance of a religious penance.

All who looked towards advancement in worldly affairs, and were of the higher orders in society, cultivated the language of Rome. It is owing to this circumstance, observes a learned historian of our country, that "the Latin language and the classical writers were preserved by the Christian clergy from that destruction which has entirely swept from us the language and the writings of Phœnicia, Carthage, Babylon, and Egypt*." We must also recollect, that the influence of the Latin language became far more permanent when the great master-works of antiquity were gradually unburied from their concealments. In this resurrection of taste and genius, they derived their immortality from the imperishable soul of their composition. All Europe was condemned to be copiers, or in despair to be plagiarists.

It is well known how the admirable literatures of

* Turner's History of England.

Greece and Rome struck a fresh impulse into literary pursuits, at that period which has been distinguished as the restoration of letters. The emigration of the fugitive Greeks conveyed the lost treasures of their more ancient literature to the friendly shores of Italy. Italy had then to learn a new language, and to borrow inspiration from another genius.

The occupation of disinterring manuscripts, which had long been buried in dungeon-darkness, was carried on with an enthusiasm of which perhaps it would be difficult for us at this day to form an adequate conception. Many exhausted their fortunes in remote journeys, or in importations from the East; and the possession of a manuscript was considered not to have been too dearly purchased by the transfer of an estate, since only for the loan of one the pledge was nothing less*. The discovery of an author, perhaps heard of for the first time, was tantamount to the acquisition of a province; and when a complete copy of Quintilian was discovered, the news circulated throughout Europe. The rapture of collation, the restoration of a corrupt text, or the perpetual commentary, became the ambition of a life, even after the era of Printing.

This was the useful age of critical erudition. It furnished the studious with honours and avocations;

* See Curiosities of Literature, article Recovery of Manuscripts.

but they were reserved only for themselves: it withdrew them from the cultivation of all vernacular literature. They courted not the popular voice, when a professorial chair, or a dignified secretaryship, offered the only profit or honour the literary man contemplated. Accustomed to the finished compositions of the ancients, the scholar turned away from the rudeness of the maternal language. There was no other public opinion than what was gathered from the writings of the Few who wrote to the Few who read; they transcribed as sacred what authority had long established; their arguments were scholastic and metaphysical, for they held little other communication with the world, or among themselves, but through the restricted medium of their writings. This state was a heritage of ideas and of opinions, transmitted from age to age with little addition or diminution. Authority and quotation closed all argument, and filled vast volumes. University responded to university, and men of genius were following each other in the sheep-tracks of antiquity. Even to so late a period as the days of Erasmus, every Latin word was culled with a classical superstition; and a week of agony was exhausted on a page finely inlaid with a mosaic of phrases*. While this

* Erasmus composed a satirical dialogue between two vindictive Ciceronians; it is said that a duel has been occasioned by the intre-

verbal generation flourished, some eminent scholars were but ridiculous apes of Cicero, and, in a cento of verses, empty echoes of Virgil. All native vigour died away in the coldness of imitation; and a similarity of thinking and of style deprived the writers of that raciness which the nations of Europe subsequently displayed when they cultivated their vernacular literature.

It is remarkable of those writers who had already distinguished themselves by their Latin works, that when they began to compose in their native language, those classical effusions on which they had confidently rested their future celebrity sank into oblivion; and the writers themselves ceased to be subjects either of critical inquiry or of popular curiosity, except in that language in which they had opened a vein of original thought, in a manner and diction the creation of their own feelings. Here their natural power, and their freed faculties, placed them at a secure interval from their imitators. Modern writers in Latin were doomed to find too many academical equals; but those who were inimitable in their vernacular idiom, could dread no

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pidity of maintaining the purity of a writer's latinity. The pedantry of mixing Greek and Latin terms in the vernacular language is ridiculed by RABELAIS in his encounter with the Limousin student, whom he terrified till the youngster ended in delivering himself in plain French, and left off "Pindarising" all the rest of his days.—*Pantagruel*, lib. ii. c. 6.

rival, and discovered how the productions of the heart, rather than those of the lexicon, were echoed to their authors in the voice of their contemporaries.

The people indeed were removed far out of the influence of literature. The people could neither become intelligent with the knowledge, nor sympathise with the emotions, concealed in an idiom which had long ceased to be spoken, and which exacted all the labour and the leisure of the cloistered student.

This state of affairs had not occurred among the Greeks, and hardly among the Romans, who had only composed their immortal works in their maternal tongue. Their arts, their sciences, and their literature were to be acquired by the single language which they used. It was the infelicity of their successors in dominion, to weary out the tenderness of youth in the repulsive labours of acquiring the languages of the two great nations whose empire had for ever closed, but whose finer genius had triumphed over their conquerors.

With the ancients, instruction did not commence until their seventh year; and till they had reached that period, Nature was not disturbed in her mysterious workings: the virgin intellect was not doomed to suffer the violence of our first barren studies—that torture of learning a language which has ceased to be spoken, by

the medium of another equally unknown. Perhaps it was owing to this favourable circumstance that, among the inferior classes of society in the two ancient nations, their numerous slaves displayed such an aptitude for literature, eminent as skilful scribes, and even as original writers.

One of the earliest prose writers in our language when style was beginning to be cultivated, has aptly described, by a domestic but ingenious image, the effect of our youth gathering the burdens of grammatical faggots in the Sylva of antiquity. It is Sir THOMAS ELYOT who speaks, in "The Boke of the Governor," printed in 1531: "By that time the learner cometh to the most sweet and pleasant rendering of old authors, the sparks of fervent desire are extinct with the burthen of grammar, like as a little fire is even quenched with a great heap of small sticks, so that it can never come to the principal logs, where it should burn in a great pleasant fire."

It was Italy, the Mother and the Nurse of Literature (as the filial zeal of her sons has hailed her), which first opened to the nations of Europe the possibility of each creating a vernacular literature, reflecting the image not of the Greeks and of the Romans, but of themselves.

Three memorable men, of the finest and most contrasted genius, appeared in one country and at one period.

With that contempt for the language of the people in which the learned participated, busied as they were at the restoration of letters by their new studies and their progressive discoveries, PETRARCH contemned his own Italian "Rime," and was even insensible to the inspiration of a mightier genius than his own,—that genius who, with a parental affection, had adopted the orphan idiom of his father-land; an orphan idiom, which had not yet found even a name; for it was then uncertain what was the true language of Italy. DANTE had at first proposed to write in Latin; but with all his adoration of his master Virgil, he rejected the verse of Virgil, and anticipated the wants of future ages. A peculiar difficulty, however, occurred to the first former of the vernacular literature of Italy. In the state of this unsettled language—composed of fragments of the latinity of a former populace, with the corruptions and novelties introduced by its new masters—deformed by a great variety of dialects—submitted, in the mouths of the people, to their caprices, and unstamped by the hand of a master—it seemed hopeless to fix on any idiom which, by its inherent nobleness, should claim the distinguished honour of being deemed Italian. DANTE denied this envied grace to any of the rival principalities of his country. The poet, however, mysteriously asserted that the true Italian "volgare" might be

discovered in every Italian city; but being common to all, it could not be appropriated by any single one. Dante dignified the "volgare illustre" which he had conceived in his mind, by magnificent titles;—it was "illustrious," it was "cardinal," it was "aulic," it was "courtly," it was the language of the most learned who had composed in the vulgar idiom, whether in Sicily, in Tuscany, in Puglia, even in Lombardy, or in the marshes of Ancona! This fanciful description of the Italian language appeared enigmatical to the methodical investigations of the cold and cautious TIRABOSCHI. That grave critic submitted the interior feeling of the poet to the test of facts and dates. With more erudition than taste, he marked the mechanical gradations—the stages of every language, from rudeness to refinement. The mere historical investigator could conceive no other style than what his chronology had furnished. But the spirit of DANTE had penetrated beyond the palpable substances of the explorer of facts, and the arranger of dates. DANTE, in his musings, had thrown a mystical veil over the Italian language; but the poet presciently contemplated, amid the distraction of so many dialects, that an Italian style would arise which at some distant day would be deemed classical. DANTE wrote, and DANTE was the classic of his country.

The third great master of the vernacular literature of Italy was Boccaccio, who threw out the fertility of his genius in the *volgare* of nature herself. This Shakespeare of a hundred tales transformed himself into all the conditions of society; he touched all the passions of human beings, and penetrated into the thoughts of men, ere he delineated their manners. Even two learned Greeks acknowledged that the tale-teller of Certaldo, in his variegated pages, had displayed such force and diversity in his genius, that no Greek writer could be compared with his "volgare eloquenza."

The Italian literature thus burst into birth and into maturity; while it is remarkable of the other languages of Europe, that after their first efforts they fell into decrepitude. Our Saxon rudeness seems to have required more hewing and polishing to be modelled into elegance, and more volubility to flow into harmony, than even the genius of its earliest writers could afford. Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio were the contemporaries of Gower, of Chaucer, and of "the Ploughman;" they delight their nation after the lapse of many centuries; while the critics of the reign of Elizabeth complained that Piers Ploughman, Chaucer, and Gower then required glossaries; and so, at a later period, did Ronsard, Baif, and Marot in France. In prose we had no single author till the close of the sixteenth century who had yet con-

structed a style; and in France Rabelais and Montaigne had contracted the rust and the rudeness of antiquity, as it seemed to the refinement of the following generation.

It cannot be thought that the genius of the Italians always excelled that of other countries, but the material which those artists handled yielded more kindly to their touch. The shell they struck gave a more melodious sound than the rough and scrannel pipe cut from the northern forests.

Custom and prejudice, however, predominated over the feelings of the learned even in Italy. Their epistolary correspondence was still carried on in Latin, and their first dramas were in the language of ancient Rome. ANGELO POLITIAN appears to have been the earliest who composed a dramatic piece, his "Orfeo," in "stilo volgare," and for which he assigns a reason which might have occurred to many of his predecessors—"perchè degli spettatori fusse meglio intesa," that he might be better understood by the audience!

The vernacular idiom in Italy was still so little in repute, while the prejudice in favour of the Latin was so firmly rooted, that their youths were prohibited from reading Italian books. A curious anecdote of the times which its author has sent down to us, however, shows that their native productions operated with a secret charm on their sympathies; for VARCHI has told

the singular circumstance that his father once sent him to prison, where he was kept on bread and water, as a penance for his inveterate passion for reading works in the vernacular tongue.

The struggle for the establishment of a vernacular literature was apparent about the same period in different countries of Europe; a simultaneous movement to vindicate the honour and to display the merits of their national idiom.

JOACHIM DE BELLAY, of an illustrious literary family, resided three years with his relative the Cardinal at Rome; the glory of the great vernacular authors of Italy inflamed his ardour; and in one of his poems he develops the beauty of "composing in our native language," by the deeper emotions it excites in our countrymen. Subsequently he published his "Defense et Illustration de la Langue Françoise," in 1549, where eloquently and learnedly he would persuade his nation to write in their own language. FERREIRA, the Portuguese poet, about the same time, with all the feelings of patriotism, resolved to give birth to a national literature; exhorting his countrymen to cultivate their vernacular idiom, which he purified and enriched. He has thus feelingly expressed this glorious sentiment—

Eu desta gloria só' fico contente
Que a minha terra amei, e a minha gente.

In Scotland we find Sir DAVID LYNDSAY, in 1553, writing his great work, on "The Monarchie," in his vernacular idiom, although he thought it necessary to apologise, by alleging the example of Moses, Aristotle, Plato, Virgil, and Cicero, who had all composed their works in their own language.

In our own country Lord BERNERS had anticipated this general movement. In 1525, when he ventured on the toil of his voluminous and spirited Froissart, he described it as "translated out of Frenshe into our *maternal English tongue*;" an expression which indicates those filial yearnings of literary patriotism which were now to give us a native literature.

The predominant prejudice of writing in Latin was first checked in Germany, France, and England by the leaders of that great Revolution which opposed the dynasty of the tiara. It was one of the great results of the Reformation, that it taught the learned to address the people. The versions of the Scriptures seemed to consecrate the vernacular idiom of every nation in Europe. Peter Waldo began to use the vernacular language in his version, however coarse, of the Bible for the Vaudois, those earliest Reformers of the Church; and though the volume was suppressed and prohibited, a modern French literary historian deduces the taste for writing in the maternal tongue to this rude but

great attempt to attract the attention of the people. The same incident occurred in our own annals; and it was the English Bible of Edward the Sixth which opened the sealed treasures of our native langüage to the multitude. Calvin wrote his great work, "The Institute of the Christian Religion," at the same time in the Latin language and in the French; and thus it happens that both these works are alike original. Calvin deemed that to render the people intelligent their instructor should be intelligible; and that if books are written for a great purpose, they are only excellent in the degree that they are multiplied. Calvin addressed not a few erudite recluses, but a whole nation.

It is unquestionable that the Reformation began to diminish the veneration for the Latin language. Whether from the love of novelty, or rather by that transition to a new system of human affairs, the pedantry of ancient standing was giving way to the cultivation of a national tongue. A great revolution was fast approaching, which would give a new direction to the studies of the scholastic gentry, and introduce a new mode of addressing the people. It was a revolution alarming those who would have walled in public opinion by circumscribing all knowledge to a privileged class. A remarkable evidence of this disposition appears in

an incident which occurred to Sir THOMAS WILSON, the author of two English treatises on the arts of Logic and of Rhetoric. An emigrant in the days of the papistic Mary, he was arraigned at Rome before the Inquisition, on the general charge of heresy, but especially for having written his "Arts of Logic" and "of Rhetoric" in a language which, at least we may presume, the whole conclave could not have criticised. The torture was not only shown to him, but he tells us that "he had felt some smart of it." The dark inquisitors taught our critic a new canon in his own favourite arts; and our English Aristarchus soon discovered how far those perfidious arts of reasoning and of eloquence may betray the hapless orator, when his words are listened to by malicious judges, equally skilled in mutilating sentences, or catching at loose words. "They brought down my great heart by telling me plainly that my *defence* had put me into further peril." Our baffled rhetorician saw that his only safety was to abstain from using the great instrument of his art, which was now locked up in silence. He was left, as he expresses himself, "without all help and without all hope, not only of liberty, but also of life." He escaped by a strange incident. It would seem that in an insurrection of the populace they set fire to the prison, and in a burst of popular freedom,

forgetful of their bigotry, or from the spirit of vengeance on their hateful masters, they suffered the heretics to creep out of their cells; an ebullition of public spirit in "the worthy Romans," which the luckless English expounder of logic and rhetoric might well account as "an enterprise never before attempted." On Wilson's return to England he was solicited to revise his admirable "Art of Rhetoric," but he strenuously refused to "meddle with it, either hot or cold." Still smarting from the torture which his innocent progeny had occasioned, he seems to have alleviated his martyrdom with the quaint humour of a querulous prologue.

In these awful transitions from one state of society to another, even the most sagacious are predisposed to discover what they secretly wish. Erasmus foresaw that a great change was approaching; but although he has delivered a prediction, it seems doubtful whether he had discerned the object aright. "I see," he writes, "a certain golden age ready to arise, which perhaps will not be my lot to partake of, yet I congratulate the world, and the younger sort I congratulate, in whose minds, however, Erasmus shall live and remain, by the remembrance of good offices he hath done." These "good offices" were restricted to his ardent labours in classical literature; but did Erasmus foresee in the change the subversion of the papal system by which

Luther had often terrified the timid quietness of our gentle recluse, or the rise of the vernacular literature which had yet no existence? Erasmus, indeed, was so little sensible of this approaching change, that his amusing Colloquies, and his Panegyric on Folly, whose satirical humour had been so happily adapted to open the minds of men, he confined to the lettered circles, as Sir Thomas More did his "Utopia," which, had it been intelligible to the people, might have impressed them with some principles of political government. The Sage of Rotterdam imagined, that the great movement of the age was to restore the classical pursuits of antiquity, and never dreamed of that which, in opposition to the ancient, soon obtained the distinction of "the New Learning," as it is expressed by Roger Ascham—the knowledge which was adapted to the wants and condition of the people. Erasmus would have been startled at the truth, that the language of antiquity would even be neglected by the generality of writers; that every European nation would have classics of their own; and that the finest geniuses would make their appeals to the people in the language of the people.

The predilection for composing in the Roman language long continued among the most illustrious writers both at home and abroad. A judicious critic in the reign of James I., Edmund Bolton, in his "Nero Cæsar," re-

commends that the history of England should be composed in Latin by the classical pen of the learned Sir Henry Saville, the editor of Chrysostom. It is indeed a curious circumstance, that when an English play was performed at the University of Cambridge before Queen Elizabeth, the Vice-Chancellor was called on to remonstrate with the ministers of Elizabeth against such a derogation of the learning and the dignity of the University. This very Vice-Chancellor, who had to protest against all English comedies, had, however, himself been the writer of "Gammer Gurton's Needle," which was long considered to be the first attempt at English comedy*. This conduct of the University offered no encouragement to men of learning and genius to compose in their vernacular idiom.

The genius of VERULAM, whose prescient views often anticipated the institutions and the discoveries of succeeding times, appears never to have contemplated the future miracles of his maternal tongue. Lord BACON did not foresee that the English language would one day be capable of embalming all that philosophy can discover, or poetry can invent; that his country, at length, would possess a national literature, and exult in

* Collier's History of Dramatic Poetry, ii. 453.

models of its own. So little did Lord Bacon esteem the language of his country, that his favourite works are composed in Latin; and what he had written in English he was anxious to have preserved, as he expresses himself, in "that universal language which may last as long as books last." It might have surprised Lord Bacon to have been told, that the learned in Europe would one day study English authors to learn to think and write, and prefer his own "Essays," in their living pith, to the colder transfusions of the Latin versions of his friends. The taste of the philosophical Chancellor was probably inferior to his invention. Our illustrious CAMDEN partook largely of this reigning fatuity when he wrote the reign of Elizabeth—the history of his contemporaries, and the "Britannia"—the history of our country, in the Latin language; as did BUCHANAN that of Scotland, and DE THOU his great history, which includes that of the Reformation in France. All these works, addressed to the deepest sympathies of the people, were not imparted to them.

There was a peculiar absurdity in composing modern history in the ancient language of a people alike foreigners to the feelings as well as to the nature of the transactions. The Latin had neither proper terms to describe modern customs, nor fitting appellatives for

titles and for names and places. The fastidious delicacy of the writers of modern latinity could not endure to vitiate their classical purity by the Gothic names of their heroes, and of the barbarous localities where memorable transactions had occurred. These great authors in their despair actually preferred to shed an obscurity over their whole history rather than to disturb the collocation of their numerous diction. Buchanan and De Thou, by a ludicrous play on words, translated the proper names of persons and of places. A Scottish worthy, *Wiseheart*, was dignified by Buchanan with a Greek denomination, *Sophocardus;* so that in a history of Scotland the name of a conspicuous hero does not appear, or must be sought for in a Greek lexicon, which, after all, may require a punister for a reader. The history of De Thou is thus frequently unintelligible; and two separate indexes of names and places, and the public stations which his personages held, do not always agree with the copy preserved in the family. The names of the persons are latinised according to their etymology, and all public offices are designated by those Roman ones which bore some fancied affinity. But the modern office was ill indicated by the ancient; the constable of France, a military charge, differed from the *magister equitum*, and the marshals of France from the *tribunus equitum*. His equivocal personages are not always

recognised in this travesty of their Roman masquerade.

A remarkable instance of the gross impropriety of composing an English history in Latin, and of the obstinate prejudice of the learned, who imagined that the ancient idiom conferred dignity on a theme wholly vernacular, appeared when the delegates of Oxford purchased ANTHONY WOOD'S elaborate work on "*The History and Antiquities of the University of Oxford.*" Our honest antiquary, with a true vernacular feeling, had written the history of an English university, during an uninterrupted labour of ten years, in his artless but natural idiom. The learned delegates opined that it was humiliating the Oxford press, to have its history pass through it in the language of the country; and Dr. Fell, with others, was chosen to dignify it into Latin. What was the result of this pompous and inane labour? The author was sorely hurt at the sight of his fair offspring disguised in its foreign and fantastic dress. What was clear in English was obscure in the circumlocution of rotund periods and affected phraseologies; the circumstantial narrative and the local descriptions, so interesting to an English reader, were not only superfluous, but repulsive to the foreigner. ANTHONY WOOD indignantly re-transcribed the whole of his English copy, and left the fair volumes to the

care of the university itself, not without the hope which has been realised, that his work should be delivered to posterity stamped by its author's native genius*.

Such was the crisis, and such the difficulties and the obstructions of that native literature in whose prosperous state every European people now exults. Homogeneous with their habitual associations, moulded by their customs and manners, and everywhere stamped by the peculiar organisation of each distinct race, we see the vernacular literature ever imbued with the qualities of the soil whence it springs, diversified yet ever true to nature. Had the native genius of the great luminaries of literature not found a vein which could reach to the humblest of their compatriots, they who are now the creators of our vernacular literature had remained but pompous plagiarists or frigid babblers, and the moderns might still have been pacing in the trammels of a mimetic antiquity.

* We now possess this valued literary history, which none perhaps but Anthony à Wood could have so fervently pursued: "*The History and Antiquities of the University of Oxford, in five volumes, quarto. Edited by John Gutch.*" It is a distinct work from the far-known *Athenæ Oxonienses*. Why did this great work, as well as some others, come forth with a Latin title? This absurdity was a remaining taint of the ancient prejudice. But an English work was not the more classical for bearing a Latin title.

ORIGIN OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

JOHNSON pronounced it impossible to ascertain when our speech ceased to be Saxon and began to be English; and although since his day English philology has extended its boundaries, the lines of demarcation are very moveable for the literary antiquary. At whatever point we set out, we may find that something which preceded has been omitted; a century may pass away and leave no precise epoch, and transitions of words and styles, like shades melting into each other, may elude perception. Too often wanting sufficient data, the toil of the antiquary becomes baffled, and the microscopic eye of the philologist pores on empty space. The learned have their theories; but in darkness we are doomed to grope, and in a circle we can fix on no beginning.

The elegant researches of Ellis, the antiquarian lore of Ritson, the simplicity of taste of Percy, the poetic fervour of Campbell, the elaborate diligence of Sharon Turner, and more recent names skilled in Saxon lore, have given opposite hypotheses, conjectures, and refutations. "A modification of language is not in reality a change," observes a powerful researcher in literary history*, who is at a loss, "whether some compositions

* Mr. Hallam.

shall pass for the latest offspring of the mother, or the earliest fruit of the daughter's fertility; " a shrewd suspicion which the genealogists of words may entertain, concerning the legitimate and the illegitimate, or the pure and the corrupt.

The Saxon language had been tainted by some Latin terms from the ecclesiastics, and some fashionable Normanisms from the court of the Confessor; when the Norman-French, fatal as the arrow which pierced Harold, by a single blow struck down that venerable form—and never has it arisen! And now, with all its pomp, such as it was, it lies entombed and coffined in some scanty manuscripts.

We indeed triumph, that the language of our forefathers never did depart from the land, since it survived among the people. What survived? It soon ceased to be a written tongue, for no one cared to cultivate an idiom no longer required, and utterly contemned. After the Conquest, the miserable Saxons lost their " book-craft." We find nothing written but the continuation of a meagre chronicle. A few pietists still lingered in occasional homilies, and a solitary charter has been perpetuated; but the style was already changed, and as a literary language, the Anglo-Saxon had for ever departed! It had sunk to the people, and they treated the ancient idiom after their fashion—the language of

books served not simple men; laying aside its inflections, and its inversions, and its arbitrary construction, they chose a shorter and more direct conveyance of their thoughts, and only kept to a language fitted to the business of daily life. This getting free from the incumbrances of the Anglo-Saxon, we may consider formed the obscure beginnings of THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE. All the gradual changes or the sudden innovations through more than two centuries may not be perceivable by posterity; but philologists have marked out how first the inversion was simplified, and then the inflections dropped; how the final E became mute, and at length was ejected; how ancient words were changed, and Norman neologisms introduced. As this English cleared itself of the nebulosity, the anomalies, and all the complex machinery of the mother idiom, a natural style was formed, very homely, for this vaunted Saxon now came from the mouths of the people, and from those friends of the people, the monks, who only wrote for their humble brother-Saxons. The English writers, who were composing in French, and the more learned, who displayed their clerkship by their Latinity, had a standard of literature which would regulate or advance their literary workmanship; but there was no standard in the language of bondage; it had mixed, as Ritson oddly describes it, "with one knows not what," a disor-

ganisation of words and idioms. Numerous DIALECTS pervaded the land; the east and the west agreed as ill together as both did with the north and the south; and they who wrote for the people each chose the dialect of their own shire.

The Saxon Chronicle, which closes with the year 1155, had been continued at progressive intervals by different writers: this authentic document of the Anglo-Saxon diction exhibits remarkable variations of style; and a critical Saxonist has detected the corruptions of its idiom, its inflections, and its orthography—in a word, that through successive periods it had suffered a material alteration in its character *.

Somewhat more than a century after the Norman invasion, about 1180, Layamon made an English version of Wace's Brut—that French metrical chronicle which the Anglo-Norman had drawn from the Latin history of Geoffry of Monmouth. Here we detect an entire changeableness of style, or rather a transformation; but what to call it the most skilful have not agreed. George Ellis drew a copious specimen of a writer unnoticed by Warton; but, confounded by "its strange orthography," and mournfully doubtful of his own meritorious glossary, he considered the style, "though simple and unmixed, yet a very barbarous Saxon." A

* Dr. Bosworth.

recent critic opines that Layamon "seems to have halted between two languages, the written and the spoken." Mr. Campbell imagines it "the dawn" of our language; while some Saxonists have branded it as semi-Saxon. It seems a language thrown into confusion, struggling to adapt itself to a new state of things; it has no Norman-French, it is saturated with Saxon, but the sentences are freed from inversions *.

About the same period as Layamon's Version of Wace, we have a very original attempt of a writer, in those days of capricious pronunciation, to convey to the reader the orthoepy by regulating the orthography. As it is only recently that we have obtained any correct notion of a writing which has suffered many misconceptions from our earlier English scholars, the history of this work becomes a bibliographical curiosity.

An ecclesiastic paraphrased the Gospel-histories. He was a critical writer, projecting a system to which he strictly adhered, warning his transcribers as punctually to observe, otherwise "they would not write the word right;" they were therefore "to write those letters twice which he had written so." The system consisted in doubling the consonant after a short vowel to regulate

* Of this recondite writer Ellis has said, "probably Layamon never will be printed;" but we live in an age of publication, and Layamon is said to be actually in the press.

the pronunciation. He wrote broth*err* and aff*terr;* is *iss,* and it *itt* *.

It is evident that this critical was also a refined writer; for it indicated some delicacy, when we find him apologising for certain additions in his version, which was metrical, not found in the original, and merely used by him for the convenience of filling up his metre. The first literary historians to whose lot it fell to record this anomalous work, among whom were HICKES and WANLEY, judging by appearances, in the superabundance of the rugged consonants, deemed this refined Anglo-Saxon's writing as the work of an ignorant scribe, or as a rude provincial dialect, or harsh enough to be the work of an English Dane; its metrical form eluded all detection, as the verses were a peculiar metre of fifteen syllables, all jumbled together as prose: as such they gave some extracts, but it is evident that this was done with little intelligence of their author. TYRWHIT, occupied on his Chaucer, had a more perci-

* Dr. Bosworth, or Mr. Thorpe, has explained this attempt more fully. "From this idea of doubling the consonant after a short vowel, as in German, we are enabled to form some tolerably accurate notions as to the pronunciation of our forefathers. Thus, Orm (or Ormin) writes *min* and *win* with a single *n* only, and *lif* with a single f, because the i is long, as in *mine*, *wine*, and *life*. On the other hand, wherever the consonant is doubled, the vowel preceding is sharp and short, as *winn*, pronounced *win*, not *wine*."—*Origin of the Germanic and Scandinavian Languages*, 24.

pient ear for these Anglo-Saxon metres, and discovered that this prose was strictly metrical; but he surely advanced no farther—he did not discover the writer's design that "the Ennglisshe writ" was for "Ennglisshe menn to lare"—to learn. Indeed, Tyrwhit, who complains that Hickes in noticing this peculiarity of spelling "has not explained the author's reason for it," himself so little comprehended the system of the double consonants, that in his extract, humorously "begging pardon" of this old and odd reformer whom the critic was not only offending, but massacring, "for not following his injunctions," he discards "all the superfluous letters!". not aware that it was the intention of the writer to preserve the orthoepy. Even our Anglo-Saxon historian missed the secret; for he has remarked on the words, that they were "needlessly loaded with double consonants." Yet he was not wholly insensible to the substantial qualities of the writer, for he discovered in the diction that "the order of words is uniformly more natural, the inflections are more unfrequent, and the phrases of our English begin to emerge." And, finally, our latest authority decides that this work, so long misinterpreted, is "the oldest, the purest, and by far the most valuable specimen of our old English dialect that time has left us *."

* Guest's Hist. of English Rhythms, ii. 186.

What is "old English" is the question. The title of this work may have perplexed the first discoverers as much as the double consonants. The writer was an ecclesiastic of the name of ORM, and he was so fascinated with his own work for the purity of its diction, and the precision of its modulated sounds, that in a literary rapture he baptised it with reference to himself; and *Orm* fondly called his work the *Ormulum!* One hardly expected to meet with such a Narcissus of literature in an old Anglo-Saxon philologist of the year so far gone by, yet we now find that Orm might fairly exult in his Ormulum!

Nearly a century after Layamon, in the same part of England, the monk ROBERT OF GLOUCESTER wrote his Chronicle, about 1280. This honest monk painfully indited for his brother-Saxons the whole history of England, in the shape of Alexandrine verse in rhyme; the diction of the verse approaches so nearly to prose, that it must have been the colloquial idiom of the west. The "Ingliss," as it was called in the course of the century between Layamon and Robert of Gloucester, betrays a striking change; and modern philologists have given the progressive term of "middle English" to the language from this period to the Reformation *. Our

* During the thirteenth century the organic change proceeded so rapidly, that there is quite as wide a difference between the language

chronicler has fared ill with posterity, of whom probably he never dreamt. Robert of Gloucester, who is entirely divested of a poetical character, as are all rhyming chroniclers, has had the hard hap of being criticised by two merciless poets; and, to render his uncouthness still more repulsive, the black-letter fanaticism of his editor has vauntingly arrayed the monk whom he venerated in the sable Gothic, bristling with the Saxon characters*.

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of Layamon and that which was written at the beginning of the fourteenth century (about the time of Robert of Gloucester), as there is between the English language of the reign of Edward the Second and the tongue of the present day. See Mr. Wright's learned Essay on the Literature of the Anglo-Saxons, 107.

* Hearne, in his preface, exclaims in ecstacy—"This is the *first book* ever printed in this kingdom, it may be in *the whole world, in the black letter*, with a mixture of *the Saxon characters*, which is the very garb that was in vogue in the author's time, that is, in the thirteenth century." Hearne often claims our gratitude, while his earnest simplicity will extort a smile. On our ancient Bibles he could not refrain from exclaiming—"Though I have taken so much pleasure in perusing the English Bible of the year 1541, yet 'tis nothing equal to that I should take in turning over that of the year 1539." His antiquarianism kindled his piety over Cranmer's Bible.

Thomas was haunted by a chimera that whatever was obsolete deserved to be revived. This honest spirit of antiquarianism, working on a most undiscerning intellect, seems to have kindled into a literary bigotry in his sateless delight of "the black-letter of our grandfathers' days." Hearne set this unhappy example of printing ancient writers with all their obsolete repulsiveness in orthography and type. He was closely followed by RITSON, and by WHITAKER in his edition of Piers Ploughman; and these editors assuredly

It has therefore required something like a physical courage to sit down to Robert of Gloucester. Yet in the rhymer whom Warton has degraded, Ellis has discovered a metrical annalist whose orations are almost eloquent, whose characters of monarchs are energetic, and what he records of his own age matter worthy of minute history.

Another monk, ROBERT MANNYNG, of Brunne, or Bourne, in Lincolnshire, who had versified PIERS LANGTOFT'S Chronicle, has left a translation of the "Manuel des Péchés," ascribed to Bishop Grosteste, who composed it in politer French. In this "Manual of Sins," or as he terms it, "A Handlyng of Sinne," according to monkish morality and the monkish devices to terrify sinners, our recreative monk has introduced short tales, some grave, and some he deemed facetious, which convey an idea of domestic life and domestic language. It is not without curiosity that we examine these, the earliest attempts at that difficult trifle —the art of telling a short tale. Robert de Brunne is neither a Mat Prior nor a La Fontaine, but he is a block

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have scared away many a neophyte in our vernacular literature. RITSON printed his "Ancient Songs," with the Saxon characters and abbreviations, which render them often unintelligible. This literary antiquary lived to regret this superstitious antiquarianism. He had prepared a new edition entirely cleared of these offences, but which unfortunately he destroyed at the morbid close of his life.

which might have been carved into one or the other, and he shows that without much art a tale may be tolerably told*. His octosyllabic verse is more fluent than the protracted Alexandrine of his Chronicle. The words fall together in natural order, and we seem to have advanced in this rude and artless "Ingliss." But the most certain evidence that "the English" was engaging the attention of those writers who professedly were devoting their pens to those whom they called "the Commonalty," is, that they now began to criticise, and we find Robert de Brunne continually protesting against "strange Ingliss." This phrase has rather perplexed our inquirers. "Strange Ingliss" would seem to apply to certain novelties in diction used by the tale-reciters and harpers, for so our monk tells us,

"I wrote
In symple speeche as I couthe,
That is *lightest in manne's mouthe.*
I mad (made) nought for no disoúrs (tale-tellers),
Ne for no seggers nor harpoúrs,
Bot for the luf (love) of symple menn
That *strange Inglis* cann not ken."

It was about this time that the metrical romances, translated from the French, spread in great number,

* Turner's History of England, v. 217, will furnish the curious reader readily with several of these specimens of the modes of thinking and of acting of the middle ages, when Monks only were the preceptors of mankind.

and introduced many exotic phrases. In the celebrated romance of "Alisaundre" we find French expressions, unalloyed by any attempt at Anglicising them, overflowing the page. The phrase is, however, once applied to certain strange metres which our monk avoided, for many "that read English would be confounded by them."

Whatever Robert de Brunne might allude to by his "strange Inglis*, the same cry and the identical ex-

* This term of "strange Inglis" has yet been found so obscure as to occasion some strictures, which, like the Interpreter in the Critic, are the most difficult to comprehend. I must refer to Monsieur Thierry's very delightful History of the Conquest of England, ii. 271, for a very refined speculation on our Robert de Brunne's unlucky obscurity. Monsieur Thierry imagines that the "strange Inglis" was the refined English which had flown into Scotland, and there become the cultivated language of the minstrels and the court, and which our hapless Saxons on *this side of the Tweed* had sunk into a dialect only fitted for serfs. This finer and more elevated English could not be understood by a base commonalty; this was "strange Inglis" to them. A very interesting event in the history of both nations had transplanted the purer English to the Scottish court:—Malcolm, whom the usurpation of Macbeth had driven from the Scottish throne, was expatriated in England during an interval of near twenty years; the affection of the monarch for the English was such, that he adopted their language, and when the royal family of England was expelled by the Conqueror, the king received them and the emigrant Saxons, and married the English princess. This gave rise to that intercourse with the south of Scotland, of which the result in our literary, if not in our civil, history is remarkable. Certain it is that much broad Scotch is good old English, and the noblest minstrelsy cometh "fra the North Countrie."

pressions are repeated by a writer not many years afterwards—RICHARD ROLLE, called "the Hermit of Hampole." He produced the earliest versions of the Psalms into English prose, with a commentary on each verse; and a voluminous poem in ten thousand lines, entitled "The Prikke of Conscience," translated from the Latin for "the unlettered men of Engelonde who can only understand English." In the prologue to this first Psalter in English prose he says, "I seke no *straunge Ynglyss*, bot *lightest* and *communest*, and wilk (such) that is most like unto the Latyn; and thos I fine (I find) no proper Inglis I felough (follow) the wit of the words, so that thai that knowes noght (not) the Latyne, be (by) the Ynglys may come to many Latyne wordys." Here we arrive at open corruption! Already a writer appears refined enough to complain of the poverty of the language in furnishing "proper Inglis" or synonymes for the Latin; the next step must follow, and that would be in due time the latinising "the Ynglys."

A great curiosity of the genuine homeliness of our national idiom at this time has come down to us in a manuscript in the Arundel collection, now in our national library. It is a volume written by a monk of St. Austin's at Canterbury in the Kentish dialect, about a century and a half after Layamon, and half a

century after Robert of Gloucester, in 1340. This honest monk, like others of the Saxon brotherhood, was writing for his humbled countrymen, or, as he expresses himself, with a rude Doric simplicity,

"Vor Vader and vor Moder and vor other Ken."

I throw into a note what I have transcribed of this specimen of the old Saxon-English, or, as it is called, "Semi-Saxon*." In this specimen of the language as spoken by the people the barbarism is native, pure in its impurity, and unalloyed by any spurious exotic. This English spoken in the Weald of Kent, Caxton

* On the leaf appears, in the hand-writing of the author, "This Boc is Dan Michelis of Northgate ywrite an Englis of his ozene hand that hatte *Ayenbyte of inwyt*, and is of the boc-house of Seynt Austyn's of Cantorberi." The writer was seventy years of age; and he tells us that he was not—

"Blind, and dyaf, and alsuo dumb,
Of zeventy yer al not rond,
Ne ssette by draze to the grond,
Uor peny nor mark, ne nor pond."

At the end the monk tells us for whom he writes—

"Nou ich wille that ye ywite hou hitt is ywent
Thet this Boc is ywrite mid Engliss of Kent.
This Boc is ymade vor lewede men,
Vor Vader and vor Moder and vor other Ken,
Ham vor to berze uram alle manyere Zen
Thet ine have inwytte ne bleue no uoul wen.
Huo ase God is his name yzed
Thet this Boc made God him yeue that bread
Of Angles of Hauene and thereto his red,
And underuongè his Zoule, huanne that is dyad."

tells us, in his time, was "as broad and rude English as is spoken in any place in England." When contrasted with the diction of a northern bard, whom a singular accident retrieved for us*, it offers a curious picture of the English language, so different at precisely the same period. The minstrel's flow of verse almost anticipates the elegance of a writer of two centuries later.

The poems of LAURENCE MINOT consist of ten narrative ballads on some of the wars of Edward the Third in Scotland and in France. The events this bard records show that his writings were completed in 1352. His editor is surprised that "the great monarch whom he so eloquently and so earnestly panegyrised was either ignorant of his existence or insensible of his merit." Minot was probably nothing more than a northern minstrel, whose celebrity did not extend many leagues. His verses convey to us a perfect conception

* While Tyrwhit was busied on the Canterbury Tales his attention was excited by the old cataloguer of the Cottonian manuscripts to a *Chaucer exemplar emendate scriptum.* On a spare leaf the name of Richard Chawser had been scrawled, which might have been that of some former possessor. There are two fatalities which hang over the pen of a slumbering cataloguer—ignorance and indolence. Our present one caught an immortal name and never travelled onwards; and, struck by the fairness of the writing, inferred that it was a copy of Chaucer critically accurate. It turned out to be the compositions of an unknown poet who not willingly relinquished his claim on posterity, for he has subscribed his name, LAURENCE MINOT.

of the minstrel character, throwing out his almost extemporaneous "Lays" on the predominant incidents of his day. All these narrative poems open by soliciting the attention of the auditors:—

> "Lithes! and I sall tell you tyll
> The bataile of Halidon Hyll."

And in another,—

> "Herkins how long King Edward lay,
> With his men before Tournay."

The singularity of these "Lays" consists in coming down to us in a written form, evidently with great care and fondness, bearing their author's unknown name. They might have appropriately been preserved in Percy's "Reliques of English Poetry*."

Three centuries had now passed, and still the national genius languished in the Norman bondage of the language. But the commonalty were increasing in number and in weight, and an indignant sense of the destitution of a national language was not confined to the laity; it was attracting the attention of those who thought and who wrote. Richard of Bury, Bishop of Durham, who put forth the first bibliographical treatise by an Englishman, and may be ranked among the earliest critical

* Ritson's first edition (1795) of Minot having become very difficult to procure, an elegant re-impression, and apparently a correct one, was published 1825.

collectors of a private library, in his celebrated treatise on the love of books, the "Philo-biblon*," breathes all the enthusiasm of study; but while he directs our attention to the classical writers of antiquity, he stimulates his contemporaries to emulate them by composing new books. Although he himself wrote in Latin, he regrets that no institution for children in the English language existed; and he complains, that our English youth "first learned the French, and from the French the Latin." Our youth were sent into France to polish their nasal Norman. This writer flourished about 1330, and thus ascertains, that in the beginning of the reign of Edward III., no English was taught. The "Polychronicon," a Latin chronicle compiled by the monk Higden, was finished somewhat later, about 1365; and we find the complaint more bitterly renewed. "There is no nation," wrote this honest monk, "whose children are compelled to leave their own language, as we have since the Normans came into England. A gentleman's child must speak

* "Philobiblon, sive de Amore Librorum et Institutione Bibliothecæ," ascribed to Richard of Bury, Bishop of Durham; but Fabricius says it was written by Robert Holcot, a learned friar, at his desire.—*Fab. Bib. Med. Ævi*, vol. i. It is the Bishop, however, who was the collector, and always speaks in his own person. It has been recently translated by Mr. Inglis.

French from the time that he is rocked in a cradle, or plays with a child's breche."

The Latin Chronicle of Higden, twenty years later, was translated into English by John de Trevisa. On this passage the translator furnishes the important observation, that, since this was written, a revolution had occurred through our grammar-schools: the patriotic efforts of one Sir John Cornewaile, in teaching his pupils to construe their Latin into English, had been generally adopted; "so that now," proceeds Trevisa, "the yere of our Lorde 1385, in alle the grammere scoles of Engelond, children leaveth Frensche, and construeth and lerneth in Englische." The innovation had startled our translator, for, like all innovations, there was loss as well as profit, when, quitting what we are accustomed to, we launch dubiously into a new acquisition. The disuse of the French would detriment their intercourse abroad, and, on great occasions, at home. This was a time when Trevisa himself, in selecting some Scriptural inscriptions for the chapel of Berkley Castle, where he was chaplain, had them painted on boards in Norman-French, and Latin, in alternate lines. They are still visible. English itself was yet too base for the service of God.

It was still a debateable question, as appears by

the prefatory dialogue between Trevisa and his patron, Lord Berkley, whether any translation of the Chronicle were at all necessary, Latin being the general language. It was, however, a noble enterprise, being the first great effort in our vernacular prose. This mighty volume is a universal history, which, in its amplitude and miscellaneous character, seemed to contain all that men could know; and the version long enjoyed the favour of all readers as the first historical collection in the English language. It bears the seal of the monkish taste, being equally pious and fabulous. It not only opens before the days of Adam, but, like the creation, has its seven divisions; it has monsters, however, which are not found in Genesis. The monk is doubtful whether they came of Adam or of Noah. They, indeed, came from the elder Pliny, to whose puerile wonders and hasty compilation we owe the foundation of our natural history.

It was about the period that Higden concluded his labours, that Sir John Mandeville deemed it wise, having written his travels in Latin and French, to compose them also in the vernacular idiom;—a strong indication of the rising disposition to cultivate the national tongue. The policy of our government now accorded with the general disposition; and hence originated the noble decision of Edward III., in

1362, to banish from our courts of law the Norman-French; but so awkward seemed this great novelty, that the statute is written in the very language it abolishes*, and, indeed, to which our great lawyers, the timid slaves of precedents, long afterwards clung in their barbarous law-French phrases mingled with their native English.

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* Barrington on the Statutes.

In Blackstone's Commentaries, book iii. chap. 21, we find much curious information, and some philosophical reflections. The use of the technical law-Latin is adroitly defended. Under Cromwell the records were turned into English; at the Restoration the practisers declared they could not express themselves so significantly in English, and they returned to their Latin. In 1730, a statute ordered that the proceedings at law should be done into English, that the common people might understand the process, &c. But after many years' experience the people are as ignorant in matters of law as before, and suffer the inconveniences of increasing *the expense of all legal proceedings* by being bound by the stamp-duties to write only a stated number of words in a sheet, *and the English language, through the multitude of its particles, is so much more verbose than the Latin, that the number of sheets is much augmented.* Two years subsequently it was necessary to make a new act to allow all technical terms to continue Latin, which were too ridiculous to be translated, such as *nisi prius, fieri facias, habeas corpus.* This last act, in 1732, has defeated every beneficial purpose intended by the preceding statute of 1730.

One hardly expected to find philological acumen in the dry discussion of law-Latin, but when the *three* words, "*secundum formam statuti*," require *seven* in English, "according to the form of the statute," one easily comprehends the heavy weight of the *stamp-duty* for *writing English.* The Saxons, who made no use of particles of speech, had more merit than we were aware of.

A mightier movement even than the royal decree in favour of fostering the national language was a translation of the Scriptures, by the intrepid spirit of Wickliffe. This had been done with the pledge of his life, for that was often in peril while he thus struck the first impulse of that reformation which not only influenced his own age, but one more remote. The translation of Wickliffe was a new revelation of the Word of God in the language of the many. The streets were crowded with Lollards, as his followers were denominated, of which, like similar odious names attached to a rising party, the origin remains uncertain; Lollardy was however a convenient term to describe treason in the Church and the State. Wickliffe's translation of the Old Testament still lies in numerous manuscripts, for our cold neglect of which we have incurred the censure of the foreigner. The New Testament has happily been printed*.

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* By the Rev. John Lewis, 1731, fo., and republished by the Rev. H. H. Baber, 1810, 4to.

The censure of Fabricius deserves our notice. After mention of Wickliffe's version of the Bible, he adds, "Mirum est Anglos eam (versionem) tam diu neglexisse quum vel linguæ causa ipsis in pretio esse debeat."—*Bib. Lat.*, v. 321.

It is provoking to be reminded of our neglected duties by a foreigner. We might assuredly be curious to learn how the sublimity and the colloquial and narrative parts of this vast treasure of our ancient language were produced under the primitive pen of

If we place by the side of the text of Wickliffe our later versions, we may become familiar with that Saxon-English which our venerable Caxton subsequently considered was "more like to Dutch than English."

But the picturesque language of our emotions, the creative diction of poetry, appeared in the courtly style of Chaucer, who nobly designed to render the national language refined and varied, while his great contemporaries, the author of Piers Ploughman lingered in a rude dialect, and Gower was still composing alternately in Latin and in French.

The emancipation of the national language was subsequently confirmed by another monarch. A curious anecdote in our literary history has recently been disclosed of Henry V. To encourage the use of the vernacular tongue, this monarch, in a letter missive to one of the city companies, declared that "*the English tongue hath in modern days begun to be honourably enlarged and adorned, and for the better understanding of the people* the common idiom should be exercised in writing:" this was at once setting aside the Norman-French and the Latin for the daily business of civil life. By this record it appears that many of the craft

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Wickliffe. A fine copy of Wickliffe's Bible was in the library of Mr. Douce, and I have heard, with great satisfaction, that it will probably be edited by Sir Francis Madden.

of brewers, to whose company this letter was addressed, had "knowledge of writing and reading in the English idiom, but Latin and French they by no means understood." We further learn that now "the LORDS and the COMMONS BEGAN *to have their proceedings noted down in the mother-tongue;*" and this example was therefore to be followed by the city companies*.

At this advanced stage of transition, so unsettled was the language of ordinary affairs, that the same document bears evidence of three different idioms. We find the petition of an Irish chieftain, a prisoner in the Tower, written in the French language, while the endorsed royal answer is in English, and the order of the council in Latin†. The bulletins of Henry V. to the mayor and aldermen of London are written in English, but endorsed in French.

As if they designed to hold out a model to their subjects, and to sanction the use of their native English, both this prince and his father, Henry IV., left their wills in the national language‡, at a time when the nobles employed Latin or French for such purposes.

There has often existed a sympathy between our-

* Herbert's History of the City Companies.

† I derive this curious fact from Mr. Tyler's History of Henry of Monmouth, ii. 245.

‡ These wills are preserved in Mr. Nichols' Collection of Royal Wills.

selves and our near neighbours of France, when not disturbed by war. This great movement of establishing a national language and freeing themselves from the Roman bondage, was tried at a later period by the French government, who were nearly baffled in the attempt. An ordinance of Louis XII. was issued *to abolish the use of the Latin tongue;* but such was the prejudice in favour of the ancient language, that notwithstanding that the Latin of the bar had degenerated into the most ludicrous barbarism, the lawyers were unwilling to yield to the popular wish. The use of Latin in France in all legal instruments lasted till the succeeding reign of Francis I., who, by two ordinances, declared that THE FRENCH LANGUAGE should be solely used in all public acts. It was, however, as late as forty years after, in 1629, that at length the public offices consented to draw their instruments in their vernacular language*. So long has general improvement to contend with the force of habit and the passion of prepossession; and such were the difficulties which the vernacular style of both these great empires had to overcome.

When the learned HICKES, in his patriotic fervour to trace the legitimacy of the English from its parent lan-

* *Le Comte de Neufchateau. Essay on French Literature* prefixed to the late edition of Pascal's Works.

guage, adjudged that "nine-tenths of our words were of Saxon origin," he exultingly appealed to the Lord's Prayer, wherein there are only three words of French or Latin extraction. This startled TYRWHIT, then busied on his Chaucerian glossary, and who in that labour had before him a different aspect of our mottled English. That was not the day when writers would maintain opinions against authority. Awed by the great Saxonist, the poetical antiquary compromised, alleging that "though the *form* of our language was still Saxon, yet the *matter* was in a great measure French." His successor in English philology, GEORGE ELLIS, still further faltered and arbitrated; suggesting that the great Saxonist, to complete his favourite scheme, would trace some *old Gaulish* French to a *Teutonic* origin. In tracing the formation of the English language, we are sensible that the broad and solid foundations lie in the Saxon, but the superstructure has often, with a magical movement, varied in its architecture. An enamoured Saxonist has recently ventured to assert that "English is but another term for Saxon;" but an ocular demonstration has been exhibited in specimens of the *modern English* of our master-writers, marking by italics all the words of Saxon derivation. By these it appears that the translators of the Bible have happily preserved for us the pristine simplicity of our Saxon-

English, like the light in a cathedral through its storied and saintly window, shedding its antique hues on hallowed objects. But as we advance, we discover in our most eminent writers the anglicisms diminish; and SHARON TURNER has observed that a fifth of the Saxon language has ceased to be used. A recent critic * has curiously calculated that the English language, now consisting of about 38,000 words, contains 23,000, or nearly five-eighths, Anglo-Saxon in their origin; that in our most idiomatic writers, there is about one-tenth *not* Anglo-Saxon, and in our least about one-third †. A cry of our desertion of our Saxon purity has been raised by those who have not themselves practised it in their more elevated compositions; but are we to deem that English corrupted which recedes from its Saxon character, and compels the daughter to lose the likeness of her mother? Are we to banish to perpetuity those foreigners

* Edinburgh Review, Oct. 1839.

† See *Quarterly Rev.*, lix. 34.—The critic is deeply imbued with his delight of Saxon-English. "The first bursts in our literature (probably the noblest are meant) are in almost pure Saxon." The critic particularly appeals to Milton for two instances; yet surely the greekised, the latinised, and even the italianised Milton will not serve to assert the pre-eminence of our venerable dialect. "A country congregation" is its more certain test; where the language of the people is the only language required. Cobbett's writings throughout are Saxon-English. Coleridge considered Asgill and De Foe the most idiomatic writers.

who have already fructified our Saxon soil? In an age of extended literature, conversant with objects and productive of associations which never entered into the experience of our forefathers, the ancient language of the people must necessarily prove inadequate; a new language must start out of new conceptions. Look into our present "exchequer of words;" there lies many a refined coinage struck out of the arts and the philosophies of Europe. Every word which genius creates, and which time shall consecrate, is a possession of the language which must be inscribed into that variable doomsday book of words—the English Dictionary. Devotees of Thor and Woden! the day of your idolatries has passed, and your remonstrances are vain as your superstitions.

VICISSITUDES OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

THE vicissitudes of the English language are more evident than its origin. In the history of a language we are perpetually reminded, by the remonstrances of the critics, of the corruptions of its purity, the perils of innovation, and the obtrusion of neologisms, while we find these same critics fastidiously rejecting what they deem the antiquated and the obsolete; many causes are constantly operating these changes of language. The style of one age ceases to be that of another; new modifications of thought create new modes of expression; and as knowledge enlarges its sphere, and society changes its manners, novel objects imperiously demand adequate terms.

Our language has been subjected to those dominant events in the history of our country which have so powerfully influenced our genius and our destiny; and, our insular position occasioning a general intercourse with all the Continental nations, our national idiom has been mottled by foreign neologisms.

For more than five centuries was the Saxon language the language of England; the awful revolution of 1066 produced novelties of all kinds, but none

greater than the entire change in our Saxon language, which, however, our Norman masters could never eradicate from among the people. During three centuries most of our English writers composed in French. When Greek was first studied in the reign of Henry the Seventh, it planted many a hellenism in our English; the translation of the Scriptures in that of Edward the Sixth, while it transmitted many latinisms, at the same time revived the simplicity of the Saxon English, which seemed to bear a sort of evidence that a primitive language was most suitable for primitive Christianity in contrast with the pompous corruptions of Rome.

Under Elizabeth favourite phrases were insinuated into the dialect by over-refined travellers, who spoke "minion-like," while the revolution of the Netherlands incorporated among us many a rough but vigorous inmate. In the days of James and Charles, the long residence of the Spanish Gondomar at our court, and the romantic pilgrimage of love to Madrid, and the political ties which bound the two nations, framed the style of courtesy, as well as set the fashions.

The puritanic commonwealth under Cromwell sunk down the language to its basest uses. Stripped to nakedness, the jargon of the market and the shop hid itself under the gibberish of its cant. Writers then

abounded equally illiterate and fanatical. Perhaps we owe to these mean scribblers the scorn and pride with which Milton constructed on the Latin model of inversions and involutions of sentences his artificial and learned prose, unlike the style of his contemporaries, and which was never to be that of his successors; it was a machinery too costly for its price, and too unwieldy for the handling of an ordinary workman. Under the second Charles we see the nation and the language equally gallicised, and so it remained to the days of Anne. Suppose for a moment that when the first Georges were appointed to the English throne, the Germany of that day had been the Germany of the present. What would have been the result? Instead of two torpid Germans, destitute of every sensibility to literature and art, we might have seen an accomplished Duke of Weimar at St. James's, and a Wieland, a Schiller, and a Goethe at our court; our authors had been impressed by the German genius, in our emulation and delight. Such is the simple history of the English language as it has been, or might have been, subjected to our national events.

The history of the vernacular language of other European nations discovers the same mutability, though not always produced by those great public incidents which may have been peculiar to ourselves. In Spain,

however, we find that the possession of that land by the Moors has left in the Castilian language a whole dictionary of Arabic words which now mingle with the vernacular idiom, and for ever shall bear witness of the triumphs of their ancient masters. But in the history of a vernacular language it may also happen that the first writers, combining in a singleness of taste, may construct a particular style. The earliest writers of France had modelled their taste by the Greek; Jodelle, Ronsard, Du Bartas, and others, imbued with Attic literature, greekised the French idiom, by their compounds, their novel terms, and their sonorous periphrases. The court and the ladies were adopting this new style, and, as usual, the unskilful were diverging into the most ridiculous affectations. But it was possible that the French language might have acquired a concision and vigour of which it is now destitute, for those early writers threw out a more original force than their tame successors. The artificial delicacy of the French critics has condemned these attempts as barbarisms; but to have transplanted these atticisms into the native soil, partook more of boldness than of barbarism. The attempt failed, if it could ever have succeeded, by the civil wars which soon drew off the minds of men from the placable innovators of language.

The French, though not an insular people, have been subject to rapid revolutions in their language. The ancient Gaulish-French has long been as unintelligible to a modern Frenchman as our Saxon is to us; even those numerous poets of France who at a later period composed in their *langue Romane*, are strewed in the fields of their poesy only as carcasses, which no miracle of antiquarian lore shall ever resuscitate. Compare the style of one writer with another only two centuries later, or Rabelais with Voltaire! The age of Louis XIV. effected the most rapid change in the vernacular style, insomuch that the diction of the writers of the preceding reign of Louis XIII. had fallen obsolete in the short space of half a century. And yet the chastened style of the age of Louis XIV. with its cold imitation of classical antiquity, was to receive a higher polish from the hand of a Pascal, a novel brilliancy from the touch of a Montesquieu, and a more numerous prose from the impassioned Rousseau. The age of erudition and taste was to be succeeded by the more energetic age of genius and philosophy. An anecdote recorded of Vaugelas may possibly be true, and is a remarkable evidence of this perpetual mobility of style. This writer lived between 1585 and 1650, and during thirty years had been occupied, *more suo*, on a translation of Quintus Curtius. It was during this protracted period

that the French style was passing through its rapid transitions. So many phrases had fallen superannuated, that this martyr to the purity of his diction was compelled to re-write the former part of his version to modernise it with his later improved composition. The learned Menage lived to be old enough to have caught alarm at this vicissitude of taste, and did not scruple to avow that no work could last which was not composed in Latin.

The languages of highly-cultivated nations are more subject to this innovation and variableness than the language of a people whose native penury receives but rare accessions. Hence the ancient and continued complaints through all the generations of critics, from the days of Julius Cæsar and Quintilian to those in which we are now writing*. The same hostility against novelty in words or in style is invariably proclaimed. The captiousness of criticism has usually referred to the style of the preceding authors as a standard from which the prevalent style of its contemporaries has erringly diverged. The preceptors of genius at all times seem to have been insensible to the natural progress of language, resisting new qualities of style and new forms of expression; in reality, this was inferring, that a perfect language exists, and that a creative genius must be

* Curiosities of Literature, Art. "History of New Words."

trammelled by their limited and arbitrary systems. This prejudice of the venerable brotherhood may, I think, be traced to its source. Every age advantageously compares itself with its predecessor, for it has made some advances, and rarely suspects that the same triumph is reserved for its successor; but besides this illusion in regard to the style, which, like the manners of the time, is passing away, the veteran critic has long been a practised master, and in the daring and dubious novelties which time has not consecrated, he must descend to a new pupillage; but his rigid habits are no longer flexible; and for the matured arbiter of literature who tastes "the bitterness of novelty," what remains but an invective against the minting of new words, and the versatility of new tastes?

The fallacy of the systematic critics arises from the principle that a modern language is stationary and stable, like those which are emphatically called "the dead languages," in which every deviation unsupported by authority is legally condemned as a barbarism. But the truth is, that every modern language has always existed in fluctuation and change. The people themselves, indeed, are no innovators; their very phrases are traditional. Popular language can only convey the single uncompounded notions of the people; it is the style of facts; and they are intel-

ligible to one another by the shortest means. Their Saxon-English is nearly monosyllabic, and their phraseology curt. Hence we find that the language of the mob in the year 1382 is precisely the natural style of the mob of this day*. But this popular style can never be set up as the standard of genius, which is mutable with its age, creating faculties and embodying thoughts which do not enter into the experience of the people, and therefore cannot exercise their understandings.

A series of facts will illustrate our principle, that the language of every literary people exists in a

* These are political squibs thrown out by the mobocracy in the reign of Richard the Second. They are preserved in Mr. Turner's History of England. I print them in their modern orthography. The first specimen runs in familiar rhymes :—

"Jack the Miller asked help to turn his mill aright. He hath ground small, small! The King's son of Heaven he shall pay for all. Look thy Mill go aright with the four sails, and the post stand in steadfastness. With Right and with Might, with Skill and with Will, let Might help Right, and Skill go before Will, and Right before Might, then goes our Mill aright, and if Might go before Right and Will before Skill then is our Mill mis adyght."

Now we have plain, intelligible prose—

"Jack Carter prays you all that ye make a good end of that ye have begun, and do well, and still better and better; for at the even men near the day. If the end be well, then is all well. Let Piers the ploughman dwell at home, and dyght us corn. Look that Hobbe the robber be well chastised. Stand manly together in truth, and help the truth, and truth shall help you."

fluctuating condition, and that its vaunted purity and its continued stability are chimerical notions.

In this history of the vicissitudes of the English language, we may commence with our remote ancestors the Anglo-Saxons. When their studies and their language received a literary character, they coveted great pomposity in their style. They interlarded their staves with Latin words; and, even in the reign of the Confessor, the French language was fashionable. "The affectation of the Anglo-Saxon literati was evidently tending to adulterate their language; and even if the Conquest had not taken place, the purity of the English language would have been speedily destroyed by the admixture of a foreign vocabulary*." Thus early were we perilling our purity!

In 1387, John de Trevisa, translating the Latin Polychronicon of Higden, tells us he avoids what he calls "the old and ancient English." A century afterwards, Caxton, printing this translation of Trevisa, had to re-write it, to change the "rude and old English, that is, to wit, certain words which in these days be neither used nor understood." It might have startled Master Caxton to have suspected that he

* Sir Francis Palgrave's "Rise and Progress of the English Commonwealth;" Proofs and Illustrations, ccxiii.

might be to us what Trevisa was to him, as it had equally amazed Trevisa, when he discovered archaisms which had contracted the rust of time, to have imagined that his fresher English were to be archaisms to his printer in the succeeding century.

At the period at which our present vernacular literature opened on us, Eliot, More, and Ascham maintained great simplicity of thought and idiom; yet even at this period, about 1550, the language seemed in imminent danger; it raised the tone of our primitive critics, and the terrors of neologism took all frightful shapes to their eyes!

A refined critic of our language then was the learned Sir JOHN CHEKE, who, at this early period, considered that the English language was capable of preserving the utmost purity of style, and he was jealously awake to its slightest violations. A friend of his, Sir THOMAS HOBY, a courtly translator of the Courtier of Castiglione, had solicited his critical opinion. The learned Cheke, equally friendly and critical, insinuated his abhorrence of "an unknown word," and apologises for his corrections, lest he should be accounted "over-straight a deemer of things, by marring his handy-work." Hoby had evidently alarmed by some sprinklings of italianisms—some capriccios of "new-fangled" words—the

chaste ear of our Anglican purist. I preserve this remarkable letter to serve as a singular specimen of our English, unpolluted even by a latinism*.

"Our own tongue should be written *clean* and *pure*, unmixt and unmangled with borrowing of other tongues, wherein, if we take not heed, by time, ever borrowing and never paying, she shall be fain to keep her house as bankrupt. For then doth our tongue naturally and praisably utter her meaning, when she borroweth no counterfeitness of other tongues to attire herself withal; but used plainly her own, with such shift as nature, craft, experience, and following of other excellent, doth lead her unto; and if she want at any time (as, being imperfect, she must), yet let her borrow with such bashfulness that it may appear, that if either the mould of our own tongue could serve us to fashion a word of our own, or if the old denizened words could content and ease this need, we would not boldly venture on unknown words. This I say, not for reproof of you, who have scarcely and necessarily used, where occasion seemeth, a strange word so, as it seemeth

* This letter to the translator Hoby has been passed over by those who collected the few letters of the learned CHEKE; and, what seems strange, appears only in the first edition of Hoby's translation, having been omitted in the subsequent editions. Perhaps the translator was not enamoured of his excellent critic.

to grow out of the matter, and not to be sought for; but for my own defence, who might be counted over-straight a deemer of things, if I gave not this account to you, my friend, of my marring this your handy-work."

Such was the tone even of our primitive critics! the terrors of neologism were always before their eyes. All those accessions of the future opulence of the vernacular language were either not foreseen or utterly proscribed, while, at the same time, the wants and imperfections of the language, amid all its purity or its poverty, were felt and acknowledged. We perceive that even this stern champion of his vernacular idiom confesses that "he may want at time, being imperfect, and must borrow with bashfulness." The cries of the critics suddenly break on us. Another contemporary critic of not inferior authority laments that "there seemed to be no mother-tongue." "The far-journeyed gentlemen" returned home not only in love with foreign fashions, but equally fond "to powder their talk with over-sea language." There was French-English and English italianated. Professional men disfigured the language by conventional pedantries; the finical courtier would prate "nothing but Chaucer." "The mystical wisemen and the poetical clerks delivered themselves in quaint proverbs and blind allegories*." The pedantic

* Sir Thomas Wilson's Arte of Rhetoric, 1553.

race, in their furious latinisms, bristling with polysyllabic pompŏsity, deemed themselves fortunate when they could fall upon "dark words," which our critic aptly describes "catching an ink-horn term by the tail." The eloquence of the more volatile fluttered in the splendid patches of modern languages. It seemed as if there were to be no longer a native idiom, and the good grain was choked up by the intruding cockle which flourished by its side. Another contemporary critic announces that "our English tongue was a gallimaufry or hodge-podge of all other speeches." ARTHUR GOLDING grieves over the disjected members of the language: —

> "Our English tongue driven almost out of kind (nature),
> Dismember'd, hack'd, maim'd, rent, and torn,
> Defaced, patch'd, marr'd, and made in scorn."

A critic who has left us "An Arte of English Poetry," written perhaps about 1550 or 1560, exhorting the poet to render his language, which however he never could in his own verses, "natural, pure, and the most usual of all his country," seemed at a loss where to fix on the standard of style. He would look to the Court to be the modellers of speech, but there he acknowledges that "the preachers, the secretaries, and travellers," were great corrupters, and not less "our Universities, where scholars use much peevish affecta-

tion of words out of the primitive languages." The coarse bran of our own native English was however to be sifted; but where was the genuine English idiom to be gathered? Our fastidious critic remonstrates against "the daily talk of northern men." The *good southern* was that "we of Middlesex or Surrey use." Middlesex and Surrey were then to regulate the idiom of all British men! and all our England was doomed to barbarism, as it varied from "the usual speech of the Court, and that of London within sixty miles, and not much above." But was our English more stable within this assigned circumference of the metropolis than any other line of demarcation? About 1580, CAREW informs us that "Within these sixty years we have incorporated so many Latin and French words as the third part of our language consisteth in them."

Some there were among us who, alarmed that such ceaseless infusions were polluting the native springs of English, would look back with veneration and fondness on our ancient masters. Our great poet SPENSER*, then youthful, declared that the language of CHAUCER was the purest English, and our bard hailed, in a verse often quoted by the critics,

"Dan Chaucer, well of English undefiled."

* Spenser's protest against the Innovators of Language may be seen in his "Three Letters," which are preserved unmutilated in Todd's Spenser; they are deficient in Hughes' edition.

But in this well are deposited many waters. Chaucer has been accused of having enriched the language with the spoils of France, blending the old Saxon with the Norman-French and the modern Gallic of his day, for which he has been vehemently censured by the austerity of philological antiquaries. Skinner and his followers have condemned Chaucer for introducing "a waggon-load of words," and have proclaimed that Chaucer "wrote the language of no age;" a reproach which has been transferred to our Spenser himself, who has transplanted many an exotic into the English soil, and re-cast many an English word for the innocent forgery of a rhyme! So that two of the finest geniuses in our literature, for re-casting the language, must lay their heads down to receive the heavy axe of verbal pedantry.

Descending a complete century, in 1656 we are surprised at discovering HEYLIN, at a period relatively modern, reiterating the language of his ancient predecessors. This later critic published his animadversions on the pedantic writings of HAMON L'ESTRANGE, who had opened on us a floodgate of latinisms. Heylin observes: "More French and Latin words have gained ground upon us since *the middle of Queen Elizabeth's reign* than were admitted by our ancestors, not only since the Norman, but the Roman conquest." This was written before the restoration of Charles the Second,

when we were to be overrun by gallicisms. This complaint did not cease with Heylin, for it has often been renewed. Heylin drew up in alphabetical order the uncouth and unusual words which are to be found in Hamon L'Estrange's History, and yet many of these foreigners since the days of Heylin have become denizens. So unsettled were the notions of our philology with regard to style, that L'Estrange could venture in his rejoinder, which contains sufficient vinaicre, as he writes it, a defence of these hard words which is entertaining. "As to those lofty words, I declare to all the world this not uningenuous acknowledgment, that having conversed with authors of the noblest and chief remark in several languages, not only their notions but their very words especially being of the most elegant import, became at length so familiar with me, as when I applied myself to this present work I found it very difficult to renounce my former acquaintance with them; but as they freely offered themselves, so I entertained them upon these considerations. First, I was confident that among learned men they needed no other passe than their own extraction; and for those who were mere English readers I saw no reason they should wonder at them, considering that for their satisfaction I had sent along with every foreigner his interpreter, to serve instead of a dictionary." Hamon L'Estrange's

Life of Charles I. was certainly a piece of infelicitous pedantry, as we may judge by this specimen*.

Even great authors glanced with a suspicious eye on these vicissitudes of language, not without a conviction that they themselves were personally interested in these uncertain novelties. It would seem as if Milton, from the new invasion of Gallic words and Gallic airiness which broke in at the Restoration, had formed some uneasy anticipations that his own learned diction and sublime form of poetry might suffer by the transition, and that Milton himself might become as obsolete as some of his great predecessors appeared to his age. The nephew of Milton, in the preface to his "Theatrum Poetarum," where the critical touch of the great master so frequently betrays itself, pleads for our ancient poets, who are not the less poetical because their style is antiquated. Writing in the reign of Charles II. in 1675, he says:—"From Queen Elizabeth's reign, the language hath not been so unpolished as to render the poetry of that time ungrateful to such as at this day will take the pains to examine it well. If no poetry should please but what is calculated to every refinement of a language, of how ill consequence this would be for

* Heylin's "Observations on the Historie of the Reign of King Charles." L'Estrange's rejoinder may be found in the second edition of his History.

the future let him consider, and make it his own case, who, being now in fair repute, shall, two or three ages hence, when the language comes to be double-refined, understand that his works are come obsolete and thrown aside. I cannot—" he, perhaps Milton, continues— "I cannot but look upon it as a very pleasant humour that we should be so compliant with the French custom as to follow set fashions, not only in garments, but in music and poetry. For clothes, I leave them to the discretion of the modish; breeches and doublet will not fall under a metaphysical consideration. But in arts and sciences, as well as in moral notions, I shall not scruple to maintain, that what was '*verum et bonum*' once, continues to be so always. Now whether the trunk-hose fancy of Queen Elizabeth's days, or the pantaloon genius of ours be best, I shall not be hasty to determine."

Would we learn the true history of a modern language, we must not apply to the CRITICS, who only press for conformity and appeal to precedents; but we must look to those other more practical dealers in words, the LEXICOGRAPHERS, who at once reveal to us all the incomings and outgoings of their great "exchequer of words." Turn over the prefaces of our elder lexicographers. Every one of them pretends to prune away the vocabulary of his predecessors, and to supply, in

this mortality of words, those which live on the lips of contemporaries. In the great tome of his record of archaisms and neologisms, the grey moss hangs about the oak, and the graft shoots forth with fresh verdure. BARET, one of our earliest lexicographers, in the reign of Elizabeth thus expresses himself:—"I thought it not meete to stuffe this worke with old obsolete words which now a daies no good writer will use*." Words spurned at by the lexicographer of 1580 had been consecrated by the venerable fathers of our literature and of the Reformation, not a century past; yet another century does not elapse when another dictionary throws all into confusion. HENRY COCKRAM, whose volume has been at least twelve times reprinted, boldly avows that "what any before me in this kind have begun I have not only fully finished, but thoroughly perfected;" and presuming on the privilege of "an interpreter of hard English words," the language is wrecked in a stormy pedantry of Latin and Greek terms, which however indicate that new corruption of our style which some writers and speakers, as Hamon L'Estrange, were attempting†. What a picture have we sketched of the

* "Alvearie, or quadruple Dictionary of four languages," 1580.

† "The English Dictionary, or an Interpreter of Hard English Words, by H. C., gent., 1658." The eleventh and twelfth editions are before me. The last, edited by another person, is not so copious as the former. In Cockram's own edition we have a first "Book"

mortality of words, through all the fleeting stages of their decadency from TREVISA to CAXTON, from CAXTON to BARET, from BARET to COCKRAM, and from COCKRAM to his numerous successors!

Thus then has our language been in perpetual movement, and that "purity of style," whose presumed violation has raised such reiterated querulousness, has in reality proved to be but a mocking phantom, fugitive or unsubstantial. Our English has often changed her dress, to attract by new graces, and has spoken with more languages than one. She has even submitted to Fashion, that most encroaching usurper of words, who sends them no one knows how and no one knows why, banishing the old and establishing the new, and who has ever found her legitimacy unquestioned when in her matured age we recognise Fashion under the consecrated name of CUSTOM.

But let us not quit this topic of "purity of style" without offering our sympathies for those who have suffered martyrdom in their chimerical devotion. In the days of my youth there were some who would not

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of his "Hard Words," followed by a second of what he calls "Vulgar Words," which are English. The last editor has wholly omitted the second part. Of the first part, or the "Hard Words," Cockram observes that "They are the *choicest words now in use*, and wherewith our language is enriched and become so copious, to which words the common sense is annexed."

write a word unwarranted by Swift or Tillotson; these were to be held fast for pure idiomatic prose, by those who felt insulted by the encumbering Lexiphanicisms of the ponderous numerosity of Johnson; and recently a return to our Saxon words, diminutive in size, has been trumpeted in a set oration at the University of Glasgow by a noble personage. This taste is rife among critics of limited studies. Charles Fox, a fine genius who turned towards the pursuits of literature too late in life, was a severe sufferer, and purified his vocabulary with a scrupulosity unknown to any purist, so nervously apprehensive was this great man lest he should not write English. Addison, Bolingbroke, and Middleton were not of sufficient authority, for he would use no word which was not to be found in Dryden. Alas! what disappointments await the few who creep along their Saxon idiom, or who would pore on the free gracefulness of Dryden as a dictionary of words and phrases! Could the chimerical purity which these are in search of be ever found, never would it lend enchantment to their page, should their taste be cold or their fancy feeble. The language of genius must be its own reflection, and the good fortune of authors must receive the stamp used in their own mint.

It happens with the destiny of words, as in the destiny of empires. Men in their own days see only

the beginnings of things, and more sensibly feel the inconvenience of that state of transition inflicted by innovation, in its first approaches often capricious, always empirical. These vicissitudes of language in their end were to produce a vernacular idiom more wealthy than our native indigence seemed to promise. All those vehement cries of the critics which we have brought together were but the sharp pangs and throes of a parturient language in the natural progress of a long-protracted birth.

A national idiom in its mighty formation, struggling into its perfect existence, encumbered by the heavy mass in which it lies involved, resembles the creation of the lion of the Bard of Paradise, when

> " ——— Half appear'd
> The tawny Lion, PAWING TO GET FREE
> HIS HINDER PARTS."

DIALECTS.

DIALECTS reflect the general language diversified by localities.

A dialect is a variation in the pronunciation, and necessarily in the orthography of words, or a peculiarity of phrase or idiom, usually accompanied by a tone which seems to be as local as the word it utters. It is a language rarely understood out of the sphere of the population by whom it is appropriated. A language is fixed in a nation by a flourishing metropolis of an extensive empire, a dialect may have existed coeval with that predominant dialect which by accident has become the standard or general language; and moreover, the contemned dialect may occasionally preserve some remains or fragments of the language which, apparently lost, but hence recovered, enable us rightly to understand even the prevalent idiom.

All nations have had dialects. Greece had them, as France and Italy have them now. Homer could have included in a single verse four or five dialects; but though the Doric and the Ionic were held the most classical, none of them were barbarous, since their finest writers have composed in these several

dialects. Even some Italian poets and comic writers have adopted a favourite dialect; but no classical English author could have immortalised any one of our own.

Ancient Greece, as Mitford describes, "though a narrow country, was very much divided by mountains and politics." And mountains and politics, which impede the general intercourse of men, inevitably produce dialects. Each isolated state with fear or pride affected its independence, not only by its own customs, but by its accent or its phrase. In France the standard language was long but a dialect. There potent nobles, each holding a separate court and sovereignty in his own province, offered many central points of attraction. The Counts of Foix, of Provence and of Toulouse, and the Dukes of Guienne, of Normandy and of Brétagne, were all munificent patrons of those who cultivated what they termed "l'art du beau parler," each in their provincial idiom. These were all subdivisions of the two rival dialects to which the Romane language had given birth. But the river Loire ran between them; and a great river has often been the boundary of a dialect: France was thus long divided. On the south of the Loire their speech was called the language of *Oc*, and on the north the language of *Oil*; names which they derived from the

different manner of the inhabitants pronouncing the affirmative *Oui.* The language of the poetical Troubadours on the south of the Loire had not the happier destiny of its rival, used by the Trouvères on the north. It was this which became the standard language, while the other remains a dialect. Here we have a remarkable incident in the history of dialects in a great country; it was long doubtful which was to become the national language; and it has happened, if we may trust an enthusiast of Languedoc, that his idiom, expressing with more vowelly softness and naïveté the familiar emotions of love and friendship, and gaiety and bonhomie, gave way to a harsher idiom and a sharp nasal accent; and all ended by the Parisian detecting the provincials by their shibboleth, and calling them all alike Gascons, and their taste for exaggeration and rhodomontade gasconades; while the southerns, who hold that what is called the French language is only a perversion of their own dialect, like our former John Bull, fling on the Parisian the old Gaulish appellative of *Franchiman**.

* Dictionnaire Languédocien-françois, par l'Abbé de Sauvages. "*Franchiman* est formé de l'Allemand et signifie *homme de France.*" The Abbé w ote in 1756, when he did not care to translate too literally; the Frank-man meant the *Free-man*, for the Franks called themselves so, as "the free people." This learned Gascon, in his zeal for the *Langue d'oc*, explains, "*Parla Franchiman*," means

The dialects of England were produced by occurrences which have happened to no other nation. Our insular site has laid us open to so many masters, that it was long doubtful whether Britain would ever possess a uniform language. The aboriginal Britons left some of their words behind them in their flight, as the Romans had done in their dominion*, and even the visiting Phœnician may have dropped some words on our coasts. The Jutes, the Angles, and the Saxons brought in a new language, and, arriving from separate localities, that language came to us diversified by dialects; and the Danes, too, joined the northern brotherhood of pirate-kings who planted themselves in our soil. The gradual predominance of the West-Saxon over the petty kingdoms which subdivided Britain first approached to the formation of a national language. The West-Saxon was the land of Alfred, and the royal cultivation of its dialect, supreme in purity as the realm stood in power, rendered it the standard language which we now call Anglo-Saxon.

"parler avec l'accent (bon ou mauvais) des provinces du nord du royaume:" an insinuation that the French accent might not be positively the better one. The good Abbé had such a perfect conviction of the superiority of his Languedocians, that he would have no other servants, not only for their superior integrity, but for that of their language.

* Palgrave, 174. They also received some in exchange, many words in Cæsar being British.—*Hearne's Leland's Itinerary*, vi.

"Had the Heptarchy (Octarchy) continued," observed Bishop Percy, "our English language would probably have been as much distinguished for its dialects as the Greek, or at least as that of the several independent states of Italy." In truth, we remained much in that condition while a power hostile to the national character assumed the sovereignty. So unsettled was the English language, that a writer at the close of the fourteenth century tells us that different parts of the island experienced a difficulty to understand one another. A diversity of pronunciation, as well as a diversity in the language, was so prevalent, that the Northern, the Southern, and the Middle-land men were unintelligible when they met; the Middle-land understood the Northern and the Southern better than the Northman and the Southman comprehended one another; the English people seemed to form an assemblage of distinct races. Even to this day, a scene almost similar might be exhibited. Should a peasant of the Yorkshire dales, and one from the vales of Taunton, and another from the hills of the Chiltern, meet together, they would require an interpreter to become intelligible to each other; but in this dilemma what county could produce the Englishman so versed in provincial dialects as to assist his three honest countrymen?

If etymology often furnishes a genealogy of words

through all their authentic descents, so likewise a map of provincial idioms might be constructed to indicate the localities of the dialects. There we might observe how an expansive and lengthened river, or intervening fells and mountains which separate two counties, can stop the course of a dialect, so that the idiom current on one side, when it passes the borders becomes intrusive, little regarded, and ere it reaches a third county has expired in the passage. Thus the Parret, we are told, is the boundary of the Somersetshire dialect; for words used east of the Parret are only known by synonyms on the west side. The same incident occurs in Italy, where a single river runs through the level plain; there the Piedmontese peasant from the western end meeting with a Venetian from the eastern could hold but little colloquial intercourse together; a Genoese would be absolutely unintelligible to both, for, according to their proverb, "Language was the gift of God, but the Genoese dialect was the invention of the devil." In those rank dialects left to run to seed in their wild state, without any standard of literature, we hardly recognise the national idiom; the Italian language sprung from one common source—its maternal Latin; but this we might not suspect should we decide solely by its dialects: and we may equally wonder how some of our own could ever have been mangled and dis-

torted out of the fair dimensions of the language of England.

All who speak a dialect contract a particular intonation which, almost as much as any local words, betrays their soil; these provincial tones are listened to from the cradle; and, as all dialects are of great antiquity, this sounding of the voice has been bequeathed from generation to generation*. It is sometimes a low muttering in the throat, a thick guttural like the Welsh, or a shrill nasal twang, or a cadence or chant; centuries appear not to have varied the tone more than the vocable. The Romance of "Octavien Imperator," which was written possibly earlier than the reign of Henry VI., is in the Hampshire dialect nearly as it is spoken now. The speech of a Yorkshireman is energetically described by our ancient Trevisa. "It is so sharpe, slytting, frotyng, and unshape, that we sothern men maye unneth understond that language." As we advance in the North, the tones of the people are described as "round and sonorous, broad open vowels,

* In that very curious *Logonomia Anglica* of the learned Alexander Gill—the father, for his son of the same name succeeded him as master of St. Paul's—we have the orthoepy of our Dialects given with great exactness. This work was produced about 1619, and we find the peculiar provincial pronunciation of the present day. A work so curious in the history of our vernacular tongue should not have been composed in Latin. Mr. Guest has carefully translated a judicious extract.—*History of English Rhythms*, ii. 204.

and the richness and fulness of the diphthongs fill their mouths" with a firm, hardy speech.

A striking contrast is observable among those who by their secluded position have held little intercourse with their neighbours, and have contracted an overweening estimation of themselves, and a provincial pride in their customs, manners, and language. Norfolk, surrounded on three sides by the sea, remains unaltered to this day, and still designates as "Shiremen" all who are born out of Norfolk, not without "some little expression of contempt." There is "a narrowness and tenuity in their pronunciation," such as we may fancy —for it is but a fancy—would steal out of the lips of reserved, proudful men, and who, as their neighbours of Suffolk run their common talk into strange melancholy cadences, have characterised their peculiar intonation as "the Suffolk whine!" In Derbyshire the pronunciation is broad, and they change the G into K. The Lancashire folk speak quick and curt, omit letters, or sound three or four words all together; thus, *I wou'didd'n*, or *I woudyedd'd*, is a cacophony which stands for *I wish you would!* When the editor of a Devonshire dialect found that it was aspersed as the most uncouth jargon in England, he appealed to the Lancashire*.

* The late Dr. Valpy told me that Mr. Walker, the orthoepist,

But such vile rustic dissonance or mere balderdash concerns not our vernacular literature, though it seems that even such agrestic rubbish may have its utility in a provincial vocabulary; for the glossary to the "Exmoor language" was drawn up for the use of lawyers on the western circuit, who frequently mistook the evidence of a rustic witness for want of an interpretation of his words. Some ludicrous misconceptions of equivocal terms or some ridiculous phraseology have been recorded in other counties, among the judges and the bar at a county assize.

But it is among our provincial dialects that we discover many beautiful archaisms, scattered remnants of our language, which explain those obscurities of our more ancient writers, singularities of phrase, or lingual peculiarities, which have so often bewildered the most acute of our commentators. After all their voluminous research and their conjectural temerity, a villager in Devonshire or in Suffolk, and, more than either, the remoter native of the North Countree, with their common speech, might have recovered the baffled commentators from their agony.

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had so intimate a knowledge of the provincial peculiarities of pronunciation, that in a private course of reading at Oxford with twelve under-graduates, he told each of them the respective place of their birth or early education.

The corrections of modern Editors have often been discovered to be only ingenious corruptions of their own whenever the original provincial idiom has started up.

These provincial modes of speech have often actually preserved for us the origin of English phraseology, and enlightened the philologist in a path unexplored. In one of the most original and most fanciful of the dramas of Ben Jonson, "The Sad Shepherd," the poet designed to appropriate a provincial dialect to the Witch Maudlin's family. He had consulted Lacy the comedian, who was a native of Yorkshire, respecting the northern phraseology. Unfortunately, this drama was never finished; and the consequence is, that the dialects are incorrectly given, and are worsened by the orthography of the printer. Yet it was from this imperfect attempt to convey some notion of our dialects that Horne Tooke was able to elucidate one of his grammatical discoveries, in regard to the conjunction IF, which, from "The Sad Shepherd," is demonstrated to be anciently the imperative of the verb GIF, or give. Thus it was, by apparently very rude dialects, this famous philologist was enabled to substantiate beyond doubt a signification which had occurred to no one but himself*.

* Tooke's Diversions of Purley, p. 141.

A language in the progress of its refinement loses as well as gains in the amount of words, and the good fortune of expressive phrases. Some become equivocal by changing their signification, and some fall obsolete, one cannot tell why, for custom or caprice arbitrate, guided by no law, and often with an unmusical ear. These discarded but faithful servants, now treated as outcasts, and not even suspected to have any habitation, are safely lodged in some of our dialects. As the people are faithful traditionists, repeating the words of their forefathers, and are the longest to preserve their customs, they are the most certain antiquaries; and their oral knowledge and their ancient observances often elucidate many an archaiological obscurity. Hence two remarkable consequences have been discovered in the history of our popular idioms; many words and phrases used in the land of Cockney, now deemed not only vulgar but ungrammatical, are in fact not corruptions of the native tongue, but the remains of what was anciently at different periods the established national dialect*.

* In "Anecdotes of the English Language, by Samuel Pegge," an antiquary, who called himself "an old modern," the reader will find several curious exemplifications of the vulgar dialect, sometimes fancifully, but often satisfactorily ascertained. It is amusing to detect what we call *vulgarisms* composing the language of Chaucer and Shakespeare, and even our Bibles and Liturgies.

This transmitted language descended to the humbler classes, unimpaired and unaugmented, through a long line of ancestry. Again, it is often probable that the provincial word which in its pronunciation merely reverses the order of the letters, as now uttered, and which is only heard from the mouths of the people, may convey the original spoken sound, and be the genuine English. Are we quite sure that the polishers may not often have been the corruptors of our language? Nor let us be positive that the metropolitan taste has always fixed on the most felicitous or the most forcible of our idiomatic words or phrases, since we may discover some lingering among our provincial dialects which should never have been dismissed, and which claim to be restored. When JOHNSON compiled his Dictionary, he was not aware of the authentic antiquity of our dialectic terms and phrases. Our literary antiquities had not yet engaged the attention of general scholars. Provincialisms were not deemed by the legislator of our language legitimate words; he did not recognise their primitive claims, nor their relative affinities, but ejected them as vagabonds. But words are not barbarous nor obsolete because no longer used in our written composition, since some of the most exquisite and picturesque, which have ceased to

enrich our writings, live in immortal pages. After the issue of Johnson's great labour, our national literature began to attract the studies of literary men, who soon perceived how this neglected but existing stock of idiomatic English in our provincialisms more certainly explained our elder writers in verse and prose. Amid the murmurs raised by the Archaiologists, ASH attempted to supply the palpable deficiency of Johnson; but the matter was too abundant, and his space too contracted. In vain he attempted his "Supplement;" all the counties in England seemed to rise against the luckless glossarist; but notwithstanding its limited utility, his vocabulary was oftne preferred for its copiousness to the more elaborate Lexicon. The spirit of inquiry was now abroad after the "winged words;" and ingenious persons, within these twenty years*, have

* RAY was the first who collected "Local Words, *North Country* and *South* and *East Country*." "The Exmoor Scolding and Courtship" are an authentic specimen of the *Exmoor Language*. The words were collected by a blind fiddler, and the dialogues were written by a clergyman with the fiddler's assistance, before 1725. We have a glossary of Lancashire words and phrases, contained in the humorous works of Tim Bobbin. Other county glossarists have appeared within the last fifteen years:—BROCKETT's "North Country Words;" "Suffolk Words and Phrases," by Major MOOR; Mr. ROGER WILBRAHAM's "Attempt at a Glossary of Cheshire Words;" Mr. JENNINGS' "Dialect of the *West of Eng-*

produced a number of provincial glossaries; but several are still wanting, particularly those of Kent, and Sussex, and Hampshire. All these glossaries collected together might form a provincial Lexicon marking each county. A few might be allowed to enter into the great dictionary of the English language; but that would not be their safest place, for they would then lie at the mercy of successive editors, who would not always discern a precious archaism amid the baseness and corruption of language. The origin, the nature, and the history of our provincial

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land," particularly the *Somersetshire words;* Mr. BRITTON on those of *Wiltshire;* and the Rev. JOSEPH HUNTER has given "The *Hallamshire* Glossary," to which are appended "Words used in *Halifax*, by the Rev. JOHN WATSON," and also an addition to the Yorkshire words, by THORESBY, the Leeds antiquary.

An investigation of the origin, nature, and history of DIALECTS was proposed by the late Dr. BOUCHER for a complete Glossary of all the Dialects of the kingdom. But these precious stores, not only of the vocables but of the domestic history of England—its manners, occupations, amusements, diet, dress, buildings, and other miscellaneous topics—rich in all the affluence of the laborious readings of more years than the siege of Troy, was but bread cast away on the waters, and was never given to the public for want of public support. After the author's death two eminent editors zealously resumed the work, which was already prepared; but the public remained so little instructed of its value, it suddenly ceased! Works of national utility should be consecrated as national property, and means should be always ready to avert such a calamity to the literature of England, and to the information of Englishmen, as was the suppression of the labours of BOUCHER.

idioms have yet never been investigated, though the subject, freed from its mere barbarisms, opens a diversified field to the philosopher, the antiquary, and the philologist.

Grose, who wrote in 1785, notices the state of those counties which were remote from the metropolis, or which had no immediate intercourse with it before "newspapers and stage-coaches imported scepticism, and made every ploughman and thresher a politician and a freethinker." The accelerated intercourse of the people has long passed beyond the diurnal folio and the evanescent stage-coach, and in a century of railroads and national schools the provincial glossary will finally vanish away.

MANDEVILLE; OUR FIRST TRAVELLER.

MANDEVILLE was the Bruce of the fourteenth century, as often calumniated and even ridiculed. The most ingenuous of voyagers has been condemned as an idle fabulist; the most cautious, as credulous to fatuity; and the volume of a genuine writer, which has been translated into every European language, has been formally ejected from the collection of authentic travels. His truest vindication will be found by comprehending him; and to be acquainted with his character, we must seek for him in his own age.

At a period when Europe could hardly boast of three leisurely wayfarers stealing over the face of the universe; when the Orient still remained but a Land of Faery, and "the map of the world" was yet unfinished; at a time when it required a whole life to traverse a space which three years might now terminate, Sir JOHN MANDEVILLE set forth to enter unheard-of regions. Returning home, after an absence of more than thirty years, he discovered a "mervayle" strange as those which he loved to record—that he was utterly forgotten by his friends!

He had returned "maugre himself," for four-and-

thirty years had not satiated his curiosity; his noble career had submitted to ordinary infirmities—to gout and the aching of his limbs; these, he lamentably tells, had "defined the end of my labour against my will, God knoweth!" The knight in this pilgrimage of life seems to have contracted a duty with God, that while he had breath he should peregrinate, and, having nothing to do at home, be honourable in his generation by his enterprise over the whole earth. And earnestly he prays "to all the *readers* and *hearers* of my book," (for "hearers" were then more numerous than "readers,") "to say for him a *Pater-Noster* with an *Ave-Maria*." He wrote for "solace in his wretched rest;" but the old passion, the devotion of his soul, finally triumphed over all arthritic pangs. The globe evidently was his true home; and thus Liege, and not London, received the bones of an unwearied traveller, whose thoughts were ever passing beyond the equator.

With us, to whom an excursion to "the Londe of Promyssioun or of Behest" has sometimes arisen out of a morning engagement—we who impelled by steam go "whither we list," with those billets which might serve as letters of recommendation in the Steppes of Tartary,—we may wonder how our knight, who would not win his way by the arts of commerce, like his predecessor Marco Polo, bore up his chivalry; for in his

traversing he had nothing to offer but his honourable sword, and probably his medical science, which might be sometimes as perilous. But difficulties insuperable to us, could not enter into the emotions, nor were they the accidents which impeded the traveller, who "on the day of St. Michael, in the year of our Lord 1322, passed the sea, and went the way to Hierusalem, and to behold the mervayles of Inde." A deep religious emotion, an obscure indefinite curiosity, and a courageous decision to wander wherever the step of man could press on the globe, to tell the world "the mervayles" it unconsciously holds within its orb, were the inspiration of a journey which stood next in solemnity to a departure to the world of spirits. Sir John had prepared himself, for he was learned not only in languages, but in authentic romance, and in romantic history; and he honestly resolved to tell all "the mervayles" which he had seen, and those which he had not; and these last were not the least.

Sir John Mandeville's probity remains unimpeached; for the accuracy of whatever he relates from his own personal observation has been confirmed by subsequent travellers. On his return to Europe he hastened to Rome to submit his book to the Pope, and to "his wise council," and "those learned men of all nations who dwell at that court." The volume was critically re-

viewed; and his holiness "ratified and confirmed my book in all points," by referring to an account in Latin: this account was probably written by some missionary; Rubriquis had been despatched on an unsuccessful mission to christianise the great Khan of Tartary in 1230; or it was the writings of Marco Polo, which could not be unknown at Rome. In that day all real information was consigned to the fugitive manuscript, partially known, and often subject to the interpolations and capricious alterations of its possessor, and what sometimes occurred, to the silent plagiarisms of other writers—of which even Mandeville himself has been suspected.

The Pope decreed that not only all that Mandeville related was veracious, but that the Latin book which his holiness possessed, contained *much more*, and from whence the Mappa Mundi had been made. Indeed Mandeville has himself told us that he wrote only from his recollections as they "would come into his mind;" these necessarily were often broken and obscure. Some "mervayles" remained unrecorded, and hereafter were to be "more plainly told;" but I fear these are lost for us.

In this "true" book, we find many things very untrue, but we may doubt whether any in that day were as positive in this opinion. The author himself designed no imposition on his readers; he tells us what he be-

lieved; part of which he had seen and the rest he had heard, and sometimes had transcribed from sources deemed by him authentic. Who can suspect the knight of spotless honour, and whose piety would not relinquish his *Ave-Marias* for a dominion? Having fought during two years under the ensign of the Sultan of Egypt, and being offered in marriage the Sultan's daughter and a province, he refused both, when his Christianity was to be exchanged for Mahometanism.

This was a period when the marvellous never weakened the authenticity of a tale. The mighty tome of Pliny, that awful repository of all the errors of antiquity, and other writers of equal name, detail prodigies and legends, and so do the Fathers. Who would not have rejoiced to transcribe Pliny or St. Austen? Who imagined that all the delectable adventures of the romances, over which they passed many a dreamy day, with the very names of the personages and the very places where they occurred, were solely chimeras of the brain? The learned Mandeville was evidently not one of these sceptics; for he observes, that "the trees of the sun and of the moon are well known to have spoken to king Alisaundre, and warned him of his death." The unquestioned fact is in that famed romance; and others might be referred to if we required additional authority. I have read of these talking trees of the sun and moon,

in *Guarino detto il Meschino*, who lived a year among them to learn his own genealogy, and then was graceless enough to laugh at these timber-oracles. Mandeville forgot not in the island of Lango, not distant from Crete, the legend of the unfortunate "Lady of the Land," who remained a dragoness, because no one had the hardihood to kiss her lips to disenchant her. He tells likewise of the Faery Lady who guarded the sparrow-hawk; whoever ventured to assist that lady during three days and nights, was rewarded by the boon of having whatever he wished. A king who, not wanting anything, had the audacity to wish to have the lady herself, was fairly warned that he did not know what he asked, as happens to the reckless; but persisting in his absolute will, he incurred the curse of perpetual war to the last of his race!

We trace such tales among the romances, with all their circumstances; and some may have reached the listener from the Arabian tale-teller. The monsters he describes Mandeville never invented; these, human and animal, he gave as some of his predecessors had done, from Pliny, or Ælian, or Ctesias *, who have sent them

* Ctesias, a physician in high repute at the Persian court, and often referred to by Diodorus. He has been universally condemned as a fabulous writer, to which charge his descriptions of some animals was liable. But a naturalist of the highest order, the famous Cuvier, has perhaps done an act of justice to this fabricator

down to be engraven in the Great Nuremberg Chronicle, and adorned in the immortal page of Shakespeare. Marco Polo had noticed that portentous bird which could lift an elephant by its claws; he does not tell us that he had seen any bird of this wing, but we all know where it is to be found—in the Arabian Tales! Sir Thomas Browne accuses Mandeville of *confirming* the fabulous accounts of India by Ctesias; but, in truth, our knight does not "confirm these refuted notions of antiquity;" he only repeats them, with the prelude of "men seyn." No one was more honest than Mandeville, for when he had to describe the locality of paradise, he fairly acknowledges that "he cannot speak of it properly, for I was not there; it is far beyond, but as I have *heard say* of wise men, it is on the highest part of the earth, nigh to the circle of the moon." However, he has contrived to describe the wall, which is not of stone, but of moss, with but a single entrance, "closed with brennynge fyre;" and though no mortal could enter, yet it was known that there was a well in paradise, whence flowed the four floods that run through the earth. "Wise men," he tells us, said this; some of these "wise men"

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of animals. Ctesias reported the mythological creations which he had witnessed in hieroglyphical representations as actual living animals. It is glorious to remove from the darkened name of a writer, unjustly condemned, the obloquy of two thousand years.—*Theory of the Earth, translated by Professor Jameson*, 76.

were the Rabbins; and three centuries afterwards, the accounts of paradise by a finer genius than Mandeville, the illustrious Rawleigh, remained much the same.

To explain some of those incredible incidents which occurred to the author himself, might exercise some critical ingenuity. Mandeville's adventure in "the Valley Perilous," when he saw the Devil's head with eyes of flame, great plenty of gold and silver which he was too frightened to touch, and, moreover, a multitude of dead bodies, as if a battle had been fought there, might probably be resolved into some volcanic eruption, the rest supplied by his own horrifying imagination; for he tells, with great simplicity, "I was more devout then than ever I was before or after, and all for the dread of fiends that *I saw in divers figures;*" that is, at the *shapes* of the disparted rocks. The travellers were beaten down by tempests, winds, and thunder, which raged in this pent-up vale. As he marks the locality, the spot may yet be ascertained.

There was no imposition practised in all such legends; it is we who are startled by the supernatural in a personal narrative; but in the fourteenth century the more wonderful the tale, the more authentic it appeared, as it sunk into the softest and richest moulds of the most germinating imagination. The

readers, or the hearers, were as well prepared to believe, as the writers prompt to gather up, their fictions. Collections of "Mirabilia Mundi," "Wonders," were a fashionable title applied to any single country, as well as to the world—to England, or Ireland, to the Holy Land, or the Indies. The "Mirabilia" might be the running title for a whole system of geography. The age of imagination has long been unfurnished of all its ingenious garniture, and yet we still catch at some evanescent hour of fancy susceptible of those ancient delights. We have lost something for which we have no substitute. Would not the modern novelist rejoice in the privilege of intermingling supernatural inventions to break the level of his every-day incidents and his trivial passions so soon forgotten? But that glowing day has set, leaving none of its ethereal hues in our cold twilight. Mandeville may still be read for those wild arabesques which so long unjustly proved fatal to his authentic narrative. His simplicity often warrants its truth; he assures us that Jerusalem is placed in the middle of the earth, because when he stuck his staff in the ground, exactly at noon, it cast no shadow; and having ascertained the spherical form of the globe, he marvels how the antipodes, whose feet are right upwards towards us, yet do not fall into the firmament! When he describes the elegant

ornaments of "a vine made of gold that goeth all about the hall, with many bunches of grapes, some white, and the red made of rubies," he tells what he had seen in some Divan; but when he records that, "the Emperor hath in his chamber a pillar of gold, in which is a ruby and carbuncle a foot long, which lighteth all his chamber by night," it may be questioned whether this carbuncle be anything more than an Arabian fancy, a tale to which he had listened. Some of his ocular marvels have been confirmed by no questionable authority. Mandeville's description of a magical exhibition before the Khan of Tartary is a remarkable instance of the strange optical illusions of the scenical art, and the adroitness of the Indian jugglers —a similar scene appears in a recent version of the autobiography of the Emperor Akber. What seemed the spells of magic to the Europeans of that age, and of which some marvellous descriptions were brought to Europe by the crusaders or the pilgrims, and embellished the romances, our exquisite masques and our grand pantomimes have realised. Three centuries were to elapse ere the court of England could rival the necromancy of the court of Tartary.

Mandeville first composed his travels in the Latin language, which he afterwards translated into French, and lastly out of French into English, that "every

man of my nation may understand it." We see the progressive estimation of the languages by this curious statement which Mandeville has himself given. The author first secured the existence of his work in a language familiar to the whole European world; the French was addressed to the politer circles of society; and the last language the author cared about was the vernacular idiom, which, at that time the least regarded, required all the patriotism of the writer in this devotion of his pen.

Copies of these travels were multiplied till they almost equalled in number those of the Scriptures; now we may smile at the "mervayles" of the fourteenth century, and of Mandeville, but it was the spirit of these intrepid and credulous minds which has marched us through the universe. To these children of imagination perhaps we owe the circumnavigation of the globe and the universal intercourse of nations*.

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* Of modern editions of Mandeville's Travels in England, that of 1725, printed by Bowyer, is a large octavo. There are numerous manuscripts of Mandeville in existence. An edition collated might discover either omissions or interpolations. This might serve as the labour of an amateur. Mandeville has not had the fortune of his predecessor Marco Polo, to have met with a Marsden, learned in geographical and literary illustration.

Long subsequently to the time that this article was written, this edition of 1725 has been reprinted, with the advantage of a bibliographical introduction by Mr. Halliwell, and a collation of texts.

CHAUCER.

In the chronology of our poetical collectors, Gower takes precedence of Chaucer unjustly, for Chaucer had composed many of his works in the only language which he has written before the elder claimed the honours of an English vernacular poet, and, probably, then only emulating the success of him who first set the glorious example. Nor less in the rank of poetry must Chaucer hold the precedence. The first true English poet is Chaucer; and notwithstanding that the rhythmical cadences of his unequal metre are now lost for us, Chaucer is the first modeller of the heroic couplet and other varieties of English versification. By the felicity of his poetic character, Chaucer was, not only the parent, but the master, of those two schools of poetry which still divide its votaries by an idle rivalry, and which have been traced, like our architecture, the one to a Gothic origin, and the other to a classical model.

The personal history of Chaucer, poetical and political, might have been susceptible of considerable development had the poet himself written it, for his biographers had no life to record. Speght, one

of the early editors, in the good method of that day, having set down a variety of heads, including all that we might wish to know of any man, when this methodiser of commonplaces came to fill up these well-planned divisions concerning Chaucer, he could only disprove what was accepted, and supply only what is uncertain. The life of Chaucer by Godwin is a theoretical life, and, as much as relates to Chaucer himself, a single fatal fact, when all was finished, dispersed the baseless vision*. The whole rested on the unauthenticated and contradictory statements of Leland, who, writing a century after the times of Chaucer, hastily collected unsubstantial traditions, and, what was less pardonable in Leland, fell into some anachronisms.

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* After Godwin had sent to press his biography of Chaucer, a deposition on the poet's age in the Herald's College detected the whole erroneous arrangement: as the edifice so ingeniously constructed had fallen on the aërial architect, he alleged truly that the deposition "contradicted the received accounts of all the biographers;" in fact, they had repeated original misstatements. The appendix therefore to the history of this modern biographer stands as a perpetual witness against its authenticity;—there are some histories to which an appendix might prove to be as fatal. In this dilemma, our bold sophist was "absurd and uncharitable enough" to add one more conjecture to his Life of Chaucer,—that "the poet, from a motive of vanity, had been induced *to state on oath* that he was about forty when, in truth, he was fifty-eight!"—*Hippisley's Chapters on Early English Literature*, 85.

This defective chronology in the life of the poet has involved the more important subject of the chronology of his works. Posterity may be little concerned in the dates of his birth and his burial—his unknown parentage—his descriptive name—and, above all, his suspicious shield, which the heralds opined must have been blazoned out of the twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth propositions of the first book of Euclid, from the poet's love of geometry, or, more obviously, from having no coat of arms to show of "far more ancient antiquity." But posterity would have been interested in the history of the genius of Chaucer, who having long paced in a lengthened circuit of verbal version and servile imitation, passed through some remarkable transitions; kindling the cold ashes of translation into the fire of invention; from cloudy allegory breaking forth into the sunshine of the loveliest landscape-painting; and from the amatory romance gliding into that vein of humour and satire which in his old age poured forth a new creation. All this he might himself have told, or Gower might have revealed, had the elder bard who lauded the lays and "ditties" of the youth of "the Clerk of Venus" loved him as well in his old age. But elegant literature, as distinguished from scholastic, was then without price or

reward. The few men of genius who have written at this early period are only known to us by their writings, and probably were more known to their contemporaries by the station which they may have occupied, than by that which they maintain with posterity.

By royal patents and grants to the poet, we trace his early life at court, his various appointments, and his honourable missions to Genoa and to France—we must not add as confidently his visit to Petrarch.

Chaucer, in his political life, was bound up with the party of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster; and, by a congenial spirit, with the novel doctrines of his friend Dr. Wickliffe. The sister of his lady finally became the third Duchess of Lancaster, and the family alliance strengthened the political bond. How the Lancastrian exploded in the poet, something we know, but little we comprehend; and those who have attempted to lift the veil have not congratulated themselves on their success. The poet himself has not entrusted his secret to posterity, except, as is usual with poets, by eloquent lamentations. The exposition of a political transaction is never without some valued results; and though deprived of names and dates, we are not without some dim lights: the palpable truth may not be obvious, but it may happen that we may stumble on it.

Chaucer himself has stated, "In *my youth* I was drawn in to be assenting to certain *conjurations* and other *great matters of ruling of citizens*, and those things have been my *drawers in and exciters* in the matters *so painted and coloured*, that *first* to me seemed then *noble and glorious for all the people*."

Here the tale is plain, for this is the language of one who early in life had engaged in some popular scheme, and these early indications of the temper of the Wickliffite or the Lancastrian, or both, had subsequently led to some more perilous attempts. They were, like all reforms, something "noble and glorious for the people," and as sometimes happens among reformers, what *at first* appeared to promise so well, ended in disappointment and "penance in a dark prison."

The locality of this patriotic act was the city of London. He alludes to "free elections by great clamours of much people, for great disease of misgovernment in the hands of "*torcentious citizens*." When the fatal day arrived that he openly joined with a party for "the people," against those citizens whom he has so awfully denounced, it is evident, though we have no means to discriminate factions, in an age of factions*,

* It has been alleged by more than one writer, that this mysterious affair relates to the election for the mayoralty of John of Northampton, a Wickliffite and a Lancastrian. But Mr. Turner,

that he and his "conjurors" discovered that "all the people" were not of one mind. This votary or this victim of reform suddenly flings his contempt at "the hatred of the mighty senators of London or of its commonalty," and closes with a painful remembrance of "the janglings of THE SHEEPY PEOPLE!" The style of Chaucer bears the stamp of passionate emotions; words of dimension, or of poignant sarcasm. The "torcentious citizens" is an awful bolt, and "the sheepy people" is sufficiently picturesque.

In dismay the whole party took flight. Chaucer, in Zealand, exhausted his means to supply the wants of his political associates, till he himself found that even the partnership of common misery does not always preserve men from ingratitude. Returning home, potent persecutors cast him into a dungeon. Was the Duke of Lancaster absent, or the Duke of Gloucester in power? Let us observe that in all these dark events, the loyalty

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whose researches are on a more extended scale than any of his predecessors, truly observes that—"There are other periods besides the one usually selected to which the personal evils which Chaucer complains of are applicable."—*Hist. of England*, v. 296. It is as likely to have occurred when Nicholas Brambre, a confidential partisan of government in the City, appointed to the mayoralty by his party, caught "the Freemen" by ambushes of armed men, and turned the Guildhall into a fortress. At such a time "Free Elections" might have been considered by Chaucer as something "noble andglorious for all the people."

of the poet is never impeached; for Chaucer enjoyed without interruption the favour of both his sovereigns, Edward III. and Richard II.; and we discover that once when dismissed from office, Richard allowed him to serve by deputy, which was evidence that Chaucer had never been dismissed by the king himself. The whole transaction, whatever it was, was a political movement between two factions. Chaucer indeed pleads that whatever he had done was under the control of others; himself being but "the servant of his sovereign." At that period the factions in the state were more potent than the monarch. In the convulsive administration of a youthful prince, they who oppose the court are not necessarily opposing the sovereign.

It was behind the bars of a gloomy window in the Tower, where "every hour appeared to be a hundred winters," that Chaucer, recent from exile, and sore from persecution, was reminded of a work popular in those days, and which had been composed in a dungeon—"The Consolations of Philosophy" by Boethius—and which he himself had formerly translated. He composed his TESTAMENT OF LOVE, substituting for the severity of an abstract being the more genial inspiration of love itself. But the fiction was a reality, and the griefs were deeper than the fancies. In this chronicle of the heart the poet moans over "the delicious

hours he was wont to enjoy," of his "richesse," and now of his destitution—the vain regret of his abused confidence—the treachery of all that "summer-brood" who never approach the lost friend in "the winter hour" of an iron solitude. The poet energetically describes his condition; there he sate "witless, thoughtful; and sightless, looking." This work the poet has composed in prose; but in the leisure of a prison the diction became more poetical in thoughts and in words than the language at that time had yet attained to, and for those who read the black letter, it still retains its impressive eloquence.

But this apology which Chaucer has left of his conduct in this political transaction has incurred a fatal censure. "Never," observes Mr. Campbell, "was an obscure affair conveyed in a more obscure apology." His political integrity has been freely suspected. Chaucer has even been struck by the brilliant arrow of the Viscount de Chateaubriand. "Courtisan, Lancastrien, Wickliffist, infidèle à ses convictions, traitre à son parti, tantôt banni, tantôt voyageur, tantôt en faveur, tantôt en disgrace." No! thou eloquent Gaul! Chaucer never was out of favour, however he may have been more than once dismissed from his office; nor can we know whether the poet was ever "infidèle à ses convictions."

Obscure must ever remain the tale of justification in a political transaction which terminated on the part of the apologist by revealing "disclosures for the peace of the kingdom," denied by those whom they implicated, though their truth was offered to be maintained by the accuser, in the custom of the times, by single combat; and by confessions which acknowledge errors of judgment, but not of intention; and by penitence, which if the patriot designed what was "glorious to all the people," he should never have repented of.

This obscure apology conceals the agony of conflicting emotions—indignation at ungrateful associates, and a base desertion of ancient friends, who were plotting against him. Whether Chaucer was desirous of burying in obscurity a story of torturous details, or one too involved in confused motives for any man to tell with the precision of a simple statement, we know of no evidence which can enable us to decide with any certainty on an affair which no one pretends to understand. Chaucer might have been the scapegoat of the sovereign, or the champion of the people. We can rather decide on his calamity than his conduct. Many are the causes which may dissolve the bonds of faithless "conjurations;" and it is not always he who abandons a party who is to be criminated by political tergiversation.

The circumstances of Chaucer's life had combined

with his versatile powers. He had mingled with the world's affairs both at home and abroad: accomplished in manners, and intimately connected with a splendid court, Chaucer was at once the philosopher who had surveyed mankind in their widest sphere, the poet who haunted the solitudes of nature, and the elegant courtier whose opulent tastes are often discovered in the graceful pomp of his descriptions. It was no inferior combination of observation and sympathy which could bring together into one company the many-coloured conditions and professions of society, delineated with pictorial force, and dramatised by poetic conception, reflecting themselves in the tale which seemed most congruous to their humours. The perfect identity of these assembled characters, after the lapse of near five centuries, make us familiar with the domestic habits and modes of thinking of a most interesting period in our country, not inspected by the narrow details of the antiquarian microscope, but in the broad mirror reflecting that truth or satire which alone could have discriminated the passions, the pursuits, and the foibles of society. Thus the painter of nature, who caught the glow of her skies and her earth in his landscape, was also the miniature portrayer of human likenesses. When Chaucer wrote, the classics of antiquity were imperfectly known in this country—the Grecian muse had never reached

our shores; this was, probably, favourable to the native freedom of Chaucer. The English poet might have lost his raciness by a cold imitation of the Latin masters; among the Italians, Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, Chaucer found only models to emulate or to surpass. Hence the English bard indulged that more congenial abundance of thoughts and images which owns no other rule than the pleasure it yields in the profusion of nature and fancy. A great poet may not be the less Homeric because he has never read Homer.

Nature in her distinct forms lies open before this poet-painter; his creative eye pursued her through all her mutability, but in his details he was a close copier. In his rural scenery there is a freshness in its luxuriance; for his impressions were stamped by their locality. This locality is so remarkable, that Pope had a notion, which he said no one else had observed, that Chaucer always described real places to compliment the owners of particular gardens and fine buildings. Let us join him in his walks—

> "When that the misty vapour was agone,
> And clear and fair was the morning,
> The dews, like silver, shining
> Upon the leaves."

The flowers sparkle in "their divers hues"—he sometimes counts their colours,—"white, blue, yellow, and red"—on their stalks, spreading their leaves in breadth

against the sun, gold-burned. His grass is "so small, so thick, so fresh of hue." The poet goes by a river whose water is "clear as beryl or crystal;" turning into "a little way towards a park in compass round, and by a small gate.

> "Whoso that would freely might gone (go)
> Into this Park walled with green stone."

The owner of that park, probably, was startled when he came to "the little way," and to "the small gate." This was either the park of some great personage, or possibly Woodstock Park, where stood a stone lodge, so long known by the name of "Chaucer's House," that in the days of Elizabeth it was still described as such in the royal grant. If poets have rarely built houses, at least their names have consecrated many.

His

> "Garden upon a river in a green mead;
> The gravel gold, the water pure as glass,"

and "the eglantine and sycamore arbour, so thickly woven, where the priers who stood without all day could not discover whether any one was within," was assuredly some particular garden. The stately grove has all the characters of its trees—the oak, the ash, and the fir—to "the fresh hawthorn,

> "Which in white motley that so swote doth smell."

In all these lovely scenes there was a delicious sense of joyous existence; the inmates of the forest burst forth,

from "the little conies, the beasts of gentle kind," to "the dreadful roe and the buck," and from their green leaves they who "with voice of angels" entranced the poet-musician—

> "So loud they sang that all the woodés rung
> Like as it should shiver in pieces small,
> And as methought that the Nightingale
> With so great might her voice out-wrest,
> Right as her heart for love would brest (burst)."

So true is the accidental remark of the celebrated Charles Fox, that "of all poets Chaucer seems to have been the fondest of the singing of birds." These were the peculiar delights in the poetic habits of Chaucer, who was an early-riser, and often mused on many a rondel in gardens, and meads, and woods, at earliest dawn. This poet's sun-risings are the most exhilarating in our poetry.

We may doubt if the vernal scenes of Chaucer can be partaken by his more chilly posterity. Did England in the seasons of Chaucer flourish with a more genial May and a more refulgent June? Or should we suspect that the travelled poet clothed our soil with the luxuriance of Provençal fancy, and borrowed the clear azure of Italy to soften the British roughness even of our skies?

Tyrwhit, the able commentator of Chaucer, has thrown out an incidental remark, which seems equally

refined and true. "Chaucer in his serious pieces often follows his author with the servility of a mere translator; and in consequence his narration is jejune and constrained (as often appears in the Romaunt of the Rose and his translations of Dante), whereas in the comic he is generally satisfied with borrowing a sligh hint of his subject, which he varies, enlarges, and embellishes at pleasure, and gives the whole the air and colour of an original; a sure sign that his genius rather led him to compositions of the latter kind."

This remark is an instance of critical sagacity. The creative faculty in Chaucer had not broken forth in his translations, which evidently were his earliest writings. The native bent of his genius, the hilarity of his temper, betrays itself by playful strokes of raillery and concealed satire when least expected. His fine irony may have sometimes left his commendations, or even the objects of his admiration, in a very ambiguous condition. The learned editor of the second part of the Paston Letters hence has been induced to infer, that the spirit of chivalry, from the reign of the third Edward, had entirely declined, and only existed in the forms of conventional and fashionable society, and had sunk into a mere foppery, a system of forms and etiquettes, because Chaucer, a court-poet, treats with irony the chivalric manners. Whether this ingenious infer-

ence will hold with literary antiquaries, I will not decide; but I am inclined to suspect that Chaucer's indulgence of his taste for irony was not in the mind of this learned editor. Our poet has stamped with his immortal ridicule the tale told in his own person—"the Rime of Sir Thopas," which is considered as a burlesque of the metrical romances. In those days there was an inundation of these romances, as "the thirst and hunger" of the present is accommodated with as spurious a brood. We have our "drafty prose" as they had their "drafty riming." But shall we infer from this ludicrous effusion of the great poet, that he held so light the venerable fablers, the ancient romancers, with whose "better parts" he had nourished his own genius? This is his own confession. Often in his years of grief, when the poet wondered

> "How he lived, for day ne night,
> I may not sleep—
> Sitting upright in my bed,"

then it was that he prescribed for his "secret sorrows" that medicine which, "drunk deeply," makes us forget ourselves. In those hours the poet

> "Bade one reach me a Boke,
> A Romance, and he it me took
> To read, and drive the Night away;
> For methought it better play
> Than play either at Chess or Tables."

And assuredly Chaucer found many passages in the old fablers not less entrancing than some of his own. Our poet indulged this vein of playful irony on persons as well as on things. A sly panegyric, sufficiently ambiguous for us to accept as a refined stroke, we find on the abstruse and interminable question of predestination; on which the Nonne's Priest declares,

"But I ne cannot boult it to the bren,
As can the holy doctor Augustín,
Or Bœcé, or *the bishop Bradwardín.*"

As this bishop, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury, was the first who treated theology on mathematical principles, and likewise wrote on the Quadrature of the Circle, we may presume "Bishop Bradwardin" rather perplexed the poet. Chaucer discovers his ironical manner when gravely stating the different theories of dreaming,—

"——— What causeth Suevenes *
On the morrow or on evens?"

he playfully concludes, and modern philosophy could no better assist the inquiry,—

"——— Whoso of these Miracles
The causes know bet† than I
Define he, for I certainly
Ne can them not, ne never thinke
To busie my witte for to swinke
To know why this is more than that is.

* Dreams. † Better.

Well worthé of this thing Clerkés,
That treaten of this and of other werkés,
For I, of none opinion
Nil."

It is with the same pleasantry he avoids all commonplace descriptions, by playfully suggesting his pretended unskilfulness for the detail, or his want of learning,—

"Me list not of the chaf, ne of the stre,
Maken so long a tale, as of the corn."

Man of Lawe's Tale.

Yet humour and irony are not his only excellences, for those who study Chaucer know that this great poet has thoughts that dissolve in tenderness; no one has more skilfully touched the more hidden springs of the heart.

The Herculean labour of CHAUCER was the creation of a new style. In this he was as fortunate as he was likewise unhappy. He mingled with the native rudeness of our English words of Provençal fancy, and some of French and of Latin growth. He banished the superannuated and the uncouth, and softened the churlish nature of our hard Anglo-Saxon; but the poet had nearly endangered the novel diction when his artificial pedantry assumed what he called "the ornate style" in "the Romaunt of the Rose" and in his "Troilus and Cressida." This "ornate style" intro-

duced sesquipedalian latinisms, words of immense dimensions, that could not hide their vacuity of thought. Chaucer seems deserted by his genius when "the ornate style" betrays his pangs and his anxiety. As the error of a fine genius becomes the error of many, because monstrous protuberances may be copied, while the softened lines of beauty remain inimitable, this "ornate style" corrupted inferior writers, who, losing all relish of the natural feeling and graceful simplicity of their master, filled their verse with noise and nonsense. This vicious style, a century afterwards, was resumed by STEPHEN HAWES. We have however a glorious evidence, amid this struggle both with a new and with a false style, of Chaucer's native good taste; he finally wholly abandoned this artificial diction; and his later productions, no longer disfigured by such tortured phrases and such remote words, awaken our sympathy in the familiar language of life and passion.

TYRWHIT has ingeniously constructed a metrical system to arrange the versification to the ear of a modern reader; by this contrivance he would have removed all obstructions in the pronunciation and in the syllabic quantities. He maintained that the lines were regular decasyllabics. But who can read this poet for any length, even the Canterbury Tales in the elaborated text of Tyrwhit, without being reminded of

its fallacy? Even the E final, on which our critic has laid such stress, though often sounded, assuredly is sometimes mute. Dan Chaucer makes at his pleasure words long or short, and dissyllabic or trisyllabic; and this he has himself told us—

> "But for the rime is light and lewde,
> Yet make it somewhat agreáble,
> Though some verse fail in a sylláble."

Our critic was often puzzled by his own ingenuity, for in some inveterate cases he has thrown out in despair an observation, that "a reader who cannot perform such operations for himself (that is, helping out the metre) had better not trouble his head about the versification of our ancient authors." The verse of Chaucer seems more carefully regulated in his later work, the Tales; but it is evident that Chaucer trusted his cadences to his ear, and his verse is therefore usually rhythmical, and accidentally metrical.

On a particular occasion the poet submitted to the restraint of equal syllables, as we discover in "The Court of Love," elaborately metrical, and addressed to "his princely lady," with the hope that she might not refuse it "for lack of ornate speech." It is evident, therefore, that Chaucer had a distinct conception of the heroic or decasyllabic verse, but he did not consider that the mechanical construction of his verse was

essential to the free spirit of his fancy. "I am no metrician," he once exclaimed; he wrote

> "Books, songs, and ditees
> In RIME, or else in CADENCE."
>
> *The House of Fame.*

This circumstance arose from the custom of the age, when poems were *recited*, and not *read*; readers there were none among the people, though auditors were never wanting; it was much the same among the higher orders. Poems were usually performed in plain chant, and a verse was musical by the modulation of the harp. There was no typographical metre placed under the eye of the reciter; the melody of the poet too often depended on the adroitness of the performer; and the only publishers of the popular poems of Chaucer were the harpers, who, in stately halls on festal days, entranced their audience with Chaucer's Tale, or his "Ballade." His poem of Troilus and Cressida, although almost as long as the Æneid, was intended to be *sung* to the harp as well as *read*, as the poet himself tells us, in addressing his poem—

> "And *redde* where so thou be, or elles *sung*."

In the most ancient manuscripts of Chaucer's works the cæsura in every line is carefully noted, to preserve the rhythmical cadence with precision; without this precaution the harmony of such loose versification

would be lost. In the later editions, when the race of roaming minstrels had departed, and our verse had become solely metrical, the printers omitted this guide to the ancient recitation. We perceive this want in the uncertain measures of Chaucer's versification; and a dexterous modulation is still required to catch the recitative of Chaucer's poems.

Are the works of our great poet to be consigned to the literary dungeon of the antiquary's closet? I fear that there is more than one obstruction which intervenes between the poet's name, which will never die, and the poet's works, which will never be read. A massive tome, dark with the Gothic type, whose obsolete words and difficult phrases, and, for us, uncadenced metre, are to be conned by a glossary as obsolete as the text, to be perpetually referred to, to the interruption of all poetry and all patience, appalled even the thorough-paced antiquary, Samuel Pegge, as appears by his honest confession. Already a practised bibliosopher proclaims, alluding to the edition by Tyrwhit of Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales," "And who reads any other portion of the poet?" Yet the "Canterbury Tales" are but the smallest portion of Chaucer's works! But some skilful critics have perpended and decided differently: even among the projected labours of Johnson was an edition of Chaucer's works; and Godwin, when dili-

gently occupied on this great poet, with just severity observed that "a vulgar judgment had been propagated by slothful and indolent persons, that the 'Canterbury Tales' are the only part of the works of Chaucer worthy the attention of a modern reader, and this has contributed to the wretched state in which his works are permitted to exist."

Are we then no longer to linger over the visionary emotions of the great poet in the fine portraitures of his genius from his youthful days, when the fever of his soul, not knowing where to seek for its true aliment, careless of life, fed on its own sad musings, in Chaucer's "DREME," or, onwards in life, in the "TESTAMENT OF LOVE," that chronicle of the heart in a prison solitude? And are we no longer interested in those personal traits Chaucer has so frequently dropped of his own tastes and humours, so that we are in fact better acquainted with Chaucer than we are with Shakespeare? Even during his official occupations, this poet loved his studious solitary nights, and frequently alludes to his passion. Must we close that "HOUSE OF FAME," with whose fragments Pope reared "The Temple?" Has all the enchantment of the moonlight-land of chivalry and fairyism in "THE FLOURE AND THE LEAFE" vanished? Are we no longer to listen to "THECOM-

PLAINT OF THE BLACK KNIGHT," which touched a duchess or a queen? or the stanzas of "THE CUCKOO AND THE NIGHTINGALE," which musically resound that musical encounter? Is the legend of pathetic tenderness in the impassioned "TROILUS," and "the sillie woman who falsed Troilus," ever to be closed? there may we pursue the vicissitudes of love, in what the poet calls "a little tragedy;" and we find Ovidian graces amid its utter simplicity. There are, indeed, vicissitudes of taste as well as of love. "Troilus and Cressida" was the favourite in the days of Henry VIII. over the "Canterbury Tales" and "The Floure and the Leafe;" it was, too, the model of Sidney in the court of Elizabeth; Love triumphed at court over Humour and Fancy.

It is true that the language of Chaucer has failed, but not the writer. The marble which Chaucer sculptured has betrayed the noble hand of the artist; the statue was finished; but the grey and spotty veins came forth, clouding the lucid whiteness.

For the poet or the poetical, the difficulty of the language may be surmounted with a reasonable portion of every-day patience. I know, from several of my literary contemporaries, that this, however, has not been conceded. The more familiar I became with Chaucer, the more I delighted in the

significance of the Chaucerian words. From some modern critics, occasionally the name of Chaucer startles the ear. One, indeed, has recently complained that "Chaucer's divine qualities are languidly acknowledged by his unjust countrymen*;" and Coleridge emphatically said, "I take unceasing delight in Chaucer. His manly cheerfulness is especially delicious in my old age. How exquisitely tender he is†!"

But the popularity of this gifted child of nature, and this shrewd observer of mankind, is doomed to another obstruction than that of his curious diction. The playfulness of his comic invention, and the freedom of his simplicity, will no longer be allowed to atone for the levity of some of his incidents. When Warton, to display the genuine vein of the Chaucerian humour, imprudently analysed the Miller's Tale, having reached the middle, the critic, recollecting himself, suddenly breaks off with a curt remark—"The sequel cannot be repeated here!" In a recklessness of all knowledge, and in an unhappy hour, the poet of Don Juan decided, while he probably would have started from Chaucer's black-letter tome, that "Chaucer, notwithstanding the praises bestowed on him, I think obscene and contemptible. He owed

* Autobiography of an Opium-Eater.—*Tait's Mag.*, August 1835.

† Coleridge's Table-Talk.

his celebrity merely to his antiquity." As if the greatest of our poets had only been celebrated in the day when Byron wrote! Yet in all the unfettered invention and nudity of style, there was no grossness in the temper, and less in the habits, of the poet. He addressed his own age as his contemporaries were doing in France and in Italy, and from whom he had borrowed the very two tales on which this censure has fallen. In telling "a merrie tale," Chaucer could not have anticipated this charge; and, in truth, for subjects which are obscene and disgustful he had no taste, as he showed in his reproof of Gower for having selected two repulsive ones — the unnatural passions of Canace and Apollonius Tyrius. Of these our Chaucer cries,—

"Of all swiche cursed stories I say, Fy!"

Our poet has himself pleaded that having fixed on his personage, he had no choice to tell any other tale than what that individual would himself have told. Before we immolate Chaucer on the altar of the Graces, we should not only listen to his plea, but to his own easy remedy for this disorder produced by his too faithful copy after nature.

"——— Whoso list not to hear,
Turn over the leaf, and chese another tale!"

Our notions and our customs of delicacy are the result

of a change in our manners of no distant period; and, compared with our neighbours, many are still but conventional. They are so even in respect to ourselves, for, not to go back to the golden days of Elizabeth, the language and the manners of the court of Anne would have startled modern decorum. The "polite conversation" of Swift has, fortunately, preserved for us specimens which we could not have imagined. Our poems, our comedies, and our tales, so late as the days of Swift and Pope, have allusions, and even incidents and descriptions, which we no longer tolerate. How far our fastidiousness lies on the surface of our lesser morals, I will not decide; but men of genius have complained that this fastidiousness has become too restrictive, by contracting the sphere of inventive humour, which flashes often in such small matters as ludicrous tales and playful levities, which must not lie on our tables.

Chaucer long remained a favourite in the most polite circles; Aubrey, at the close of the seventeenth century, in his "Idea," recommends the study of Chaucer, as the poet in full reputation. At a later period, the days of Dryden and Pope, our versifiers were continually renovating his humour and his more elegant fictions. OGLE, with others, attempted to modernise Chaucer; but it is as impossible to give such a version of Chaucer as to translate the Odes of Horace. They corrupted by their

interpolations, and weakened by their diffusion; Chaucer was not discernible in the dimness of their paraphrase. The great beauties of Chaucer spring up from the soil in which they lie imbedded; and the most skilful hand will discover that in gathering the flower it must cease to live without its root.

We never possessed a tolerably correct edition of this master-poet; and the very circumstance of the continued popularity of the poems with the many has occasioned their present wretched condition. When works circulated in their manuscript state, before the era of printing, the popularity of a poet made his text the more liable to corruption. Multiplied transcripts were produced by heedless or licentious scribes, whose careless omissions, and whose perpetuated blunders and even interpolations, can only be credited by the collators of the manuscripts of Chaucer. This happened with the very first printed edition by Caxton. Our patriarchal publisher discovered that he had printed from a very faulty manuscript, and, in that primitive age of simplicity and printing, nobly suppressed the edition which dishonoured the author, and substituted an improved one. Doubtless GOWER, a grave and learned poet, whose copies are remarkably elegant, has descended to us in a purer condition than CHAUCER, for he was rarely transcribed. Speght was the first editor who

gave a more complete edition of Chaucer, with the useful appendage of a glossary, the first of its kind, and which has been a fortunate acquisition for later glossographers. But Speght, with the aid of Stowe, who was equally industrious, was so deficient in critical acumen, as to have impounded any stray on the common stamped with the initials of Chaucer. Thus our poet has suffered all the mischances of faithless scribes, unintelligent printers, and uncritical editors. To make the bad worse, the last modern edition of Chaucer, by URRY, though recommended by the white letter, offering this bland relief to a modern reader, is a showy volume, of which we are forbidden to read a line! The history of this edition is an evidence how ill our scholars, at no remote period, were qualified to decide on the fate of a great vernacular author. Urry, the pupil of Dean Aldrich, and the friend of Bishop Atterbury, appears to have been one of that galaxy or confederacy of wits called "the Wits of Christ Church." The "Student of Christ Church, Oxon," offered a title and a place which would sanction an edition of Chaucer; one object of which was to contribute five hundred pounds to finish Peckwater Quadrangle. The pompous folio appeared heralded by the queen's licence for the exclusive sale for fourteen years. Our editor at first seems to have been reluctant and modest, till instigated by his great

patrons to divest himself of all fear of the author. In his innocence conceiving that the strokes of his own pen would silently improve an obsolete genius, this merciless interpolator, changing words and syllables at pleasure, has furnished a text which Chaucer never wrote * ! If the worst edition that was ever published contributed to finish Peckwater Quadrangle, it is amusing to be reminded that causes are often strangely disproportionate to their effects.

The famous portion of Chaucer's Miscellaneous Volume has been fortunate in the editorial cares of TYRWHIT. Tyrwhit, a scholar as well as an antiquary, was an expert philologer; his extensive reading in the lore of our vernacular literature and our national antiquities promptly supplied what could not have entered into his more classical studies; and his sagacity seems to have decided on the various

* So unskilful or so incurious was Warburton in the language of our ancient poets, that in his notes on Pope he quotes the following lines of Chaucer—

"Love wol not be *constreined* by maistrie.
Whan maistrie cometh, the *God* of love anon
Beteth his wings, and *farewel*, he is gon"—

from Urry's edition, in which they appear thus transformed and corrupted:

"Love will not be *confined* by maisterie.
When maisterie comes, the *Lord* of love anon
Flutters his wings, and *forthwith* is he gone."

readings, of all the manuscripts, by piercing into the core of the poet's thoughts.

It is remarkable that some of the most lively productions of several great writers have been the work of their maturest age. Johnson surpassed all his preceding labours in his last work, the popular Lives of the Poets. The "Canterbury Tales" of Chaucer were the effusions of his advanced age, and the congenial versions of Dryden were thrown out in the luxuriance of his later days. Milton might have been classed among the minor poets, had he not lived to be old enough to become the most sublime. Let it be a source of consolation, if not of triumph, in a long studious life of true genius, to know that the imagination may not decline with the vigour of the frame which holds it; there has been no old age for many men of genius.

We must lament that at such an early period in our vernacular literature, we have to record that the two fathers of our poetry, congenial spirits as they were, too closely resembled most of their sons—in one of the most painful infirmities of genius. I have said elsewhere that jealousy, long supposed to be the offspring of little minds, is not however confined to them. We do not possess the secret history of the two great poets, Chaucer and Gower; but we are told by Berthelet in his edition of Gower's "Confessio Amantis," when he

quotes the commendatory lines on Gower by Chaucer, that the poets "were both excellently learned, *both great frendes together.*" Ancient biographers usually fall into this vague style of eulogy, which served their purpose rather than a more critical research. True it is that "they were both great friends," but, what Berthelet has not told, they became also "both great enemies." We know that Chaucer has commemorated the dignified merits of "the moral Gower," and that Gower has poured forth an effusion not less fervid than elegant from the lips of Venus, who calls Chaucer "her own clerk, who in the flower of his youth had made ditees and songes glad which have filled the land." Did this little passion of poetic jealousy creep into their great souls? Else how did it happen that Chaucer, who had once solicited the correcting hand of his friend, in his latest work reprehended the sage and the poet, and that Gower, who had not stinted the rich meed of his eulogy which appeared in the first copies of his "Confessio Amantis," erased the immortality which he had bestowed. The justice of their reciprocal praise neither of these rivals could efface, for that outlives their little jealousies.

GOWER.

In the church of St. Saviour in Southwark may be viewed an ancient monument with its sculptured and Gothic canopy; pictured on its side, the three visionary virgins, Charity, Mercy, and Pity, solicit the prayer of the passenger for the soul of the suppliant whose image lies extended on the tomb, with folded hands, and in his damask habit flowing to his feet. His head reposes on three mighty tomes, and is decked with a garland, either of roses which proclaim his knighthood, or the wreath of literature which would more justly distinguish the wearer,—John Gower, the poet.

In the life of this poet, almost the only certain incident seems to be his sepulchral monument; and even this it had been necessary to repair after the malignity of the Iconoclasts; and of the three sculptured volumes which support the poet's head, a single one only has been opened by the world, for the tomb has perpetuated what the press has not.

The three tomes on the tomb of Gower represent his three great works; but what is remarkable, and shows the unsettled state of our literature, each of these great works is written in a different language, though equally

graced with Latin titles. The first, in French, is the *Speculum Meditantis;* the moral reflections relieved by historical examples. The second, in Latin verse, is *Vox Clamantis;* this "Voice" comes not from the desert, for it is that of the clamours of the people; a satire on all ranks, and an exhortation to the youthful monarch to check his own self-indulgence; it includes a chronicle of the insurrection of the populace, or "the clowns," as they were called in Richard the Second's reign. The vernacular style, rather than Latin verse, would have more aptly celebrated the feats of Wat Tyler, of Bet and Sim, Gibbe and Hyke, Hudde and Judde, Jack and Tib. The reporter had no doubt been present at the active scene. The swarm rush on to the call of one another, in hexameters and pentameters. The singularity of the subject, which gives no bad picture of the hurry of a disorderly mob, and the felicity of an old translation, induce me to preserve a partial extract from the manuscript. Our own age has witnessed similar scenes.

Watte vocat, cui Thome venit, neque Symme retardat,
Betteque, Gibbe simul Hyke venire jubent.
Colle furit, quem Gibbe juvat nocumenta parantes,
Cum quibus ad dampnum Wille coire vovet.
Grigge rapit, dum Dawe strepit, comes est quibus Hobbe,
Lorkin et in medio non minor esse putat.
Hudde ferit, quos Judde terit, dum Tebbe juvatur,
Jacke domos que viros vellit, et ense necat.

Tom comes, thereat, when called by Wat, and Simon as forward we find;
Bet calls as quick to Gibb, and to Hyck that neither would tarry behinde.
Gibbe, a good whelp of that litter, doth help mad Coll more mischief to do,
And Will he doth vow, the time is come now, he'll join with their company too.
Davie complains whiles Grigg gets the gains, and Hobb with them doth partake;
Lorkin aloud, in the midst of the crowd, conceiveth as deep is his stake.
Hudde doth spoil, whom Judde doth foile, and Tebbe lends his helping hand,
But Jack, the mad-patch, men and horses doth snatch, and kills all at his command.

The third and greater work, and the only printed one of Gower, is the *Confessio Amantis*, an English poem of about thirty thousand lines; a singular miscellany of allegory, of morality, and of tales. It is studded with sententious maxims and proverbs, and richly diversified with narrations, pleasant and tragic; but the affectation of learning, for learning in its crude state always obtrudes itself, even in works of recreation, has compressed the Aristotelian philosophy, to edify and surprise the readers of the poet's fairy or romantic tales. Robert de Brunne, to illustrate monachal morals, interspersed domestic stories; and amidst the prevalent penury of imagination, that rhyming monk affords the most ancient specimens of English tales in verse: and

as Gower's single printed work is of the same species of composition, a system of ethics illustrated by tales, it has been thought that the monk who rhymed in 1300 was the true predecessor of the poet who flourished at the close of that century, however Gower may have purified the "rime doggrel," and elevated the puerile tale. The straw-roof must be raised before the cupola. Genius in its genealogy must not blush at its remote ancestor; the noblest knight may often go back to the mill or the forge. If this rude moralising rhymer really be the poetical father of Gower, then is this antiquated monk the inventor of that narrative poetry which Chaucer, Spenser, and Dryden, and even some of our contemporaries, have so delightfully diversified. But story-telling has been of all periods.

There is a portion in this volume which concerns the personal history of the poet.

This work was composed at the suggestion of Richard the Second himself, who among other luxuries loved Froissart's romance and Chaucer's rhymes, and was even willing to be taught the grave lessons which he could not practise. As Gower one day was rowed in his boat on the Thames, he met his "liege lord" in the royal barge, who commanded the poet to enter, and, in a long unrestrained conversation, desired him "to book some new thing in the way he was used."

Probably the youthful monarch alluded to the *Vox Clamantis*, in which the poet had exhorted his "liege lord" to exercise every kingly virtue, and had without reserve touched on too many imperfections of a court-life. It was to be "a book," added the young monarch, "in which he himself might often look." The poet aspired to fix the honour which he had received, and resolved, in his own words,

> "To write in such a manner-wise,
> Which may be wisdom to the wise,
> And play to them that list to play."

In a word, we have here the great Horatian precept by the intuition of our earliest poet.

The political admonitions, and the keen satire on the youthful favourites of the youthful monarch of a luxurious court, and the relaxed morals of the higher ranks, the clergy, and the judges, were all offered with more than the freedom of a poet—they sound the deep tones of the patriot. The sage had solemnly contemplated on the discontents and clamours of the people, and presciently observed the rising of that state-tempest, which in an instant dethroned this magnificent and thoughtless prince.

In the course of the reign of Richard the Second it appears that several alterations were made in the poem. The dedicatory preface was suppressed. Berthelet, the

ancient printer of the *Confessio Amantis*, discovered that "the prologue" had disappeared, though the same number of lines were substituted, "cleane contrary both in sentence and in meaning." Gower has therefore incurred the reproach of a disloyal desertion of his hapless master to court a successful usurper. One critic tells that "he was given to change with the turns of state." Bishop Nicholson, with dull levity, has a fling at all poets, for he censures Gower for "making too free with his prince—a liberty it seems allowed to men of his profession;" while Thomas Hearne, the blind bigot of passive obedience, in editing a monkish life of Richard the Second, would have all Gower condemned to oblivion, because "he had treated the monarch's memory ill, and spoke with equal freedom of the clergy." This vacillating conduct of "the moral Gower," however, need not leave any stain on his memory. We see he had never at any time adulated the youthful monarch; however his tales may have charmed the royal ear, the verse often left behind a wholesome bitterness. Gower had praised Henry of Lancaster at a period when he could not have contemplated the change of dynasty; and when it happened, the poet was of an age far too advanced either to partake of the hopes or the fears that wait on a new reign.

But this tale of Gower's free and honest satire on courts and courtiers is not yet concluded. The sphere of a poet's influence is far wider than that of his own age; and however we may now deem of this grave and ancient poet, he still found understanding admirers so late as in the reign of Charles the First. In the curious "Conference" which took place when Charles the First visited the Marquess of Worcester, at Ragland Castle, with his court, there is the following anecdote respecting the poet Gower.

The marquess was a shrewd though whimsical man, and a favourite of the king for his frankness and his love of the arts. His lordship entertained the royal guest with extraordinary magnificence. Among his rare curiosities was a sumptuous copy of Gower's volume.

Charles the First usually visited the marquess after dinner. Once he found his lordship with the book of John Gower lying open, which the king said he had never before seen. "Oh!" exclaimed the marquess, "it is a book of books! and if your majesty had been well versed in it, it would have made you a king of kings."

"Why so, my lord?"

"Why, here is set down how Aristotle brought up and instructed Alexander the Great in all the rudiments and principles belonging to a prince." And

under the persons of Aristotle and Alexander, the marquess read the king such a lesson that all the standers-by were amazed at his boldness.

The king asked whether he had his lesson by heart, or spake out of the book?

"Sir, if you would read my heart, it may be that you might find it there; or if your majesty pleased to get it by heart, I will lend you my book."

The king accepted the offer.

Some of the new-made lords fretted and bit their thumbs at certain passages in the marquess' discourse; and some protested that no man was so much for the absolute power of a king as Aristotle. The marquess told the king that he would indeed show him one remarkable passage to that purpose, and turning to the place, read

> "A king can kill, a king can save;
> A king can make a lord a knave;
> And of a knave, a lord also."

On this several new-made lords slank out of the room, which the king observing, told the marquess, "My lord, at this rate you will drive away all my nobility."

This amusing anecdote is an evidence that this ethical poet, after two centuries and a half, was not forgotten; his spirit was still vital, his volume still lay open on the library table; it afforded a pungent lesson

to the courtiers of Charles the First, as it had to those of Richard the Second.

GOWER was learned, didactic, and dignified. The manuscripts of his works are usually noble and sumptuous copies; more elegantly written and more richly illuminated than the works of other poets. His common-places and his legendary lore seem to have awed the simplicity of the readers of two centuries, whose taste did not yet feel that failure of the poet who narrated a fable from Ovid with the dull prolixity of a matter-of-fact chronicler. His fictions are rarely imaginative; yet critics, far abler judges of his relative merits than ourselves, since they lived within the sphere of his influence, hailed this grave father of our poesy. Leland, the royal antiquary of Henry the Eighth, expressed his ideas with great elegance and sensibility, when he said of Gower that "his diligent culture of our poesy had extirpated the ordinary herbs; and that the soft violet and the purple narcissus were now growing, where erst was nothing seen but the thistle and the thorn." There are indeed some graceful flowers in his desert. But all criticism is usually relative to the age, and excellence is always comparative. GOWER stamped with the force of ethical reasoning his smooth rhymes; and this was a near approach to poetry itself. If in the mind of CHAUCER

we are more sensible of the impulses of genius—those creative and fugitive touches—his diction is more mixed and unsettled than the tranquil elegance of GOWER, who has often many pointed sentences and a surprising neatness of phrase. A modern reader, I think, would find the style of Gower more easily intelligible than the higher efforts of the more inventive poet.

PIERS PLOUGHMAN.

CONTEMPORARY with GOWER and CHAUCER lived the singular author of "The Visions of William concerning PIERS PLOUGHMAN;" singular in more respects than one, for his subject, his style, and, we may add, for the intrepidity and the force of his genius.

This extraordinary work is ascribed to one whose name is merely traditional, to Robert Langland, a secular priest of Salop; when he wrote, and where he died, are as dubious as his text, the authenticity of which is often uncertain from the variations in all the manuscripts. But the real life of an author, at least for posterity, lies beyond the grave; and no writer is nameless whose volume has descended to us as one of the most memorable in our ancient vernacular literature.

In character, in execution, and in design, "The Visions of William of PIERS PLOUGHMAN" are wholly separated from the polished poems of GOWER and CHAUCER; the work bears no trace of their manner, nor of their refinement, nor of their versification; and it has baffled conjectural criticism to assign the exact period of a composition which

appears more ancient than any supposed contemporary writings. Those who would decide of the time in which an author wrote by his style, here are at a loss to conceive that the splendid era of romantic chivalry, the age of Edward the Third and his grandson, which produced the curious learning and the easy rhymes of the "Confessio Amantis," and the pleasantry and the fine discriminations of character of "The Canterbury Tales," could have given birth to the antiquated Saxon and rustic pith of this genuine English bard. Either his labour was concluded ere the writings of the court poets had travelled to our obscure country priest in his seclusion in a distant county, or else he disdained their exotic fancies, their latinisms, their gallicisms, and their italianisms, and their trivial rhymes, that in every respect he might remain their astonishing contrast, with no inferiority of genius. There was no philosophical criticism in the censure of this poet by Warton, when he condemns him for not having "availed himself of the rising and rapid improvements of the English language," and censures him for his "affectation of obsolete English." These rising improvements may never have reached our bard, or if they had, he might have disdained them; for the writer of the Visions concerning Piers Plough-

man was strictly a national poet; and there was no "affectation of obsolete English" in a poet preserving the forms of his native idiom, and avoiding all exotic novelties in the energy of his Anglo-Saxon genius. His uncontaminated mind returned to or continued the Anglo-Saxon alliterative metre and unrhymed verse; he trusted its cadence to the ear, scorning the subjection of rhyme. WEBBE, a critic of the age of Elizabeth, considered this poet as "the first who had observed the quantity of our verse without the curiosity of rhyme."

It is useless to give the skeleton of a desultory and tedious allegorical narrative. The last Editor, Dr. Whitaker, imagined that "he for the first time had shown, that it was written after a regular and consistent design," notwithstanding that he himself confesses, that "the conclusion is singularly cold and comfortless, and *leaves the inquirer, after a long peregrination, still remote from the object of his search*,"—a conclusion where nothing is concluded! The visionist might have been overtaken by sleep among the bushes of the Malvern Hills for twenty cantos more, without at all deranging anything which he had said, or inconveniencing anything which he might say. In truth, it is a heap of rhapsodies, without any artifice of connexion or involution of

plot, or any sustained interest of one actor more than another among the numerous ideal beings who flit along the dreamy scenes.

The true spirit of this imaginative work is more comprehensible than any settled design. That mysterious or mythical personage, "Piers Ploughman," is the representative of "the Universal Church," says Dr. Whitaker; or "Christian life," says Mr. Campbell. What he may be is very doubtful, for we have "True Religion," a fair lady, who puts in surely a higher claim to represent "the Universal Church," or "Christian life," than "the Ploughman," who has to till his half-acre and save his idling companions from "waste" and "want." The most important personage is "Mede," or bribery, who seems to exert an extraordinary influence over the Bench, and the Bar, and the Church, and through every profession which occurred to the poet.

The pearls in these waters lie not on the surface. The visionist had deeper thoughts and more concealed feelings than these rhapsodical phantoms. In a general survey of society, he contemplates on the court and the clergy, glancing through all the diversified ranks of the laity, not sparing the people themselves, as their awful reprover. It was a voice from the wilderness in the language of the people. The children of want and

oppression had found their solitary advocate. The prelacy, dissolved in the luxuriousness of papal pomp, and a barbarous aristocracy, with their rapacious dependents, were mindless of the morals or the happiness of those human herds, whose heads were counted, but whose hearts they could never call their own.

We are curious to learn, in this disordered state of the commonwealth, the political opinions entertained by this sage. They are as mysterious as Piers Ploughman himself.

Passive obedience to the higher powers is inculcated, apparently rather for its prudence than its duty. This we infer from his lively parable of "the Cat of a Court," and "A Route of Ratones and Small Mice." Grimalkin, though sometimes apt to play the tyrant when appetite was sharp, would often come laughing and leaping among them. A rat, a whisker of renown, cunningly proposed to adorn the cat with an ornament, like those which great lords use who wear chains and collars about their necks; it should be a tinkling-bell, which if cats would fancy the fashion, would warn us of their approach. We might then in security be all lords ourselves, and not be in this misery of creeping under benches. But not a raton of the whole rout, for the realm of France, or to win all England, would bind the bell round the imperial neck. A mouseling, who did

not much like rats, concluded that if they should even kill the cat, then there would come another to crunch us and our kind; for men will not have their meal nibbled by us mice, nor their nights disturbed by the clattering of roystering rats. Better for us to let the cat alone! My old father said a kitten was worse. The cat never hurt me; when he is in good-humour, I like him well, —and by my counsel cat nor kitten shall be grieved. I will suffer and say nothing. The beast who now chastiseth many, may be amended by misfortune. Are the rats to be our governors? I tell ye, we would not rule ourselves!" The poet adds, "What this means, ye men who love mirth interpret for me, for I dare not!"

The parable seems sufficiently obvious. The ratons represent a haughty aristocracy, and "the small mouse" is one of the people themselves, who in his mouse-like wisdom preferred a single sovereign to many lords. But the poet's own reflection, addressed to "the men of mirth," seems enigmatic. Is he indulging a secret laugh at the passive obedience of the prudential mouse?

Our author's indignant spirit, indeed, is vehemently democratic. He dared to write what many trembled to whisper. Genius reflects the suppressed feelings of its age. It was a stirring epoch. The spirit of inqui-

sition had gone forth in the person of Wickliffe; and wherever a Wickliffe appears, as surely will there be a Piers Ploughman. When a great precursor of novel opinions arises, it is the men of genius in seclusion who think and write.

But our country priest, in his contemplative mood, was not less remarkable for his prudence than for his bold freedom, aware that the most corrupt would be the most vindictive. The implacable ecclesiastics, by the dread discipline of the church, would doom the apostle of humanity, but the apostate of his order, to perpetual silence—by the spell of an anathema; and the haughty noble would crush his victim by the iron arm of his own, or of the civil power. The day had not yet arrived when the great were to endure the freedom of reprehension. The sage, the satirist, and the seer, for prophet he proved to be, veiled his head in allegory; he published no other names than those of the virtues and the vices; and to avoid personality, he contented himself with personification.

A voluminous allegory is the rudest and the most insupportable of all poetic fictions; it originates in an early period of society—when its circles are contracted and isolated, and the poet is more conversant with the passions of mankind than with individuals. A genius

of the highest order alone could lead us through a single perusal of such a poem, by the charm of vivifying details, which enables us to forget the allegory altogether —the tedious drama of non-entities or abstract beings. In such creative touches the author of Piers Ploughman displays pictures of domestic life, with the minute fidelity of a Flemish painting; so veracious is his simplicity! He is a great satirist, touching with caustic invective or keen irony public abuses and private vices; but in the depth of his emotions, and in the wildness of his imagination, he breaks forth in the solemn tones and with the sombre majesty of Dante.

But this rude native genius was profound as he was sagacious, and his philosophy terminated in prophecy. At the era of the Reformation they were startled by the discovery of an unknown writer, who, two centuries preceding that awful change, had predicted *the fate of the religious houses from the hand of a king.* The visionary seer seems to have fallen on the principle which led Erasmus to predict that "*those who were in power*" would seize on the rich shrines, because *no other class of men* in society could mate with so mighty a body as the monks. Power only could accomplish that great purpose, and hence our Vaticinator fixed on the highest as the most likely; and the deep foresight of an obscure country priest, which required two cen-

turies to be verified, became a great moral and political prediction.

Without, however, depreciating the sagacity of the predictor, there is reason to suspect that the same thought was occurring to some of the great themselves. The Reformation of Henry the Eighth may be dated from the reign of Richard the Second. That mighty transition into a new order of events in our history would then have occurred, for the stag was started and the hunt was up. It was an accidental and unexpected circumstance which turned aside the impending event, which was to be future and not immediate. Henry Bolingbroke, in the early part of his life, seems to have entertained some free opinions respecting the property of the church. He seemed not unfavourable to Wickliffe's doctrines, and, when Earl of Derby, once declared that "princes had too little and religious houses too much." This unguarded expression, which was not to be forgotten, we are told, occasioned one of the rebellions during his reign. But when Henry Bolingbroke usurped the throne, age and prudence might have come together; the monarch balanced the dread of a turbulent aristocracy, and the uncertain tenure of dominion to be held at their pleasure, against the security of sheltering the throne under the broad alliance of a potent prelacy; a potent prelacy whose doom was fixed, though the hour

had not yet struck! The monarch affixed a bloody seal to this political convention by granting a statute which made the offence of heresy capital; a crime which heretofore in law was as unknown as it seemed impossible to designate, and described only in figurative terms, as something very alarming, but which any prudent heretic might easily, if not explain, at least recant. To give it more solemnity, the statute is delivered in Latin, and the punishment of burning was to be inflicted "*coram populo, in eminente loco**."

The Visions of Piers Ploughman, when the day which his prescience anticipated arrived, were eagerly received; it is said the work passed through three editions in one year, about 1550, in the reign of the youthful monarch of the Reformation; the readers at that early period of printing would find many passages congenial to the popular sentiments, and our nameless author was placed among the founders of a new era.

The "VISIONS OF PIERS PLOUGHMAN" will always offer studies for the poetical artist. This volume, and not Gower's nor Chaucer's, is a well of English undefiled. SPENSER often beheld these Visions; MILTON, in his sublime description of the Lazar House, was surely inspired by a reminiscence of Piers Ploughman. Even Dryden, whom we should not suspect to be much

* Barrington's Observations on the more ancient Statutes.

addicted to black-letter reading beyond his Chaucer, must have carefully conned our Piers Ploughman; for he has borrowed one very striking line from our poet, and possibly may have taken others. BYRON, though he has thrown out a crude opinion of Chaucer, has declared that "the Ploughman" excels our ancient poets. And I am inclined to think that we owe to Piers Ploughman an allegorical work of the same wild invention, from that other creative mind, the author of the Pilgrim's Progress. How can we think of the one, without being reminded of the other? Some distant relationship seems to exist between the Ploughman's *Dowell* and *Dobet*, and *Dobest*, Friar *Flatterer*, *Grace* the Portress of the magnificent Tower of *Truth* viewed at a distance, and by its side the dungeon of *Care*, *Natural Understanding*, and his lean and stern wife *Study*, and all the rest of this numerous company, and the shadowy pilgrimage of the "Immortal Dreamer" to "the Celestial City." Yet I would mistrust my own feeling, when so many able critics, in their various researches after a prototype of that singular production, have hitherto not suggested what seems to me obvious *.

Why our rustic bard selected the character of a

* For the general reader I fear that "The Visions of Piers Ploughman" must remain a sealed book. The last edition of Dr. WHITAKER, the most magnificent and frightful volume that was ever

ploughman as the personage adapted to convey to us his theological mysteries, we know not precisely to ascertain; but it probably occurred as a companion fitted to the humbler condition of the apostles themselves. Such, however, was the power of the genius of this writer, that his successors were content to look for no one of a higher class to personify their solemn themes. Hence we have "The Crede of Piers Ploughman;" "The Prayer and Complaint of the Ploughman;" "The Ploughman's Tale," inserted in Chaucer's volume; all being equally directed against the vicious clergy of the day.

"The Crede of Piers Ploughman," if not written by the author of the Vision, is at least written by a scholar who fully emulates his master; and Pope was so deeply struck with this little poem, that he has very carefully analysed the whole.

beheld in the black letter, was edited by one whose delicacy of taste unfitted him for this homely task: the plain freedom of the vigorous language is sometimes castrated, with a faulty paraphrase and a slender glossary; and passages are slurred over with an annihilating &c. Much was expected from this splendid edition; the subscription price was quadrupled, and on its publication every one would rid himself of the mutilated author. The editor has not assisted the reader through his barbarous text interspersed with Saxon characters and abbreviations, and the difficulties of an obscure and elliptical phraseology in a very antiquated language. Should ever a new edition appear, the perusal would be facilitated by printing with the white letter. There is an excellent specimen for an improved text and edition in Gent. Mag., April 1834.

OCCLEVE; THE SCHOLAR OF CHAUCER.

WARTON passed sentence on OCCLEVE as "a cold genius, and a feeble writer." A literary antiquary, from a manuscript in his possession, published six poems of Occleve; but that selection was limited to the sole purpose of furnishing the personal history of the author *. Ritson's sharp snarl pronounced that they were of "peculiar stupidity;" George Ellis refused to give "a specimen;" and Mr. Hallam, with his recollection of the critical brotherhood, has decreed, that "the poetry of Occleve is wretchedly bad, abounding with pedantry, and destitute of grace or spirit." We could hardly expect to have heard any more of this doomed victim—this ancient man, born in the fourteenth century, standing before us, whose dry bones will ill bear all this shaking and cuffing.

* "*Poems by* THOMAS HOCCLEVE, *never before printed, selected from a manuscript in the possession of George Mason, with a preface, notes, and glossary*, 1796." The notes are not amiss, and the glossary is valuable; but the verses printed by Mason are his least interesting productions. The poet's name is here written with an H, as it appeared in the manuscript; but there is no need of a modern editor changing the usual mode, because names were diversely written or spelt even in much later times. The present writer has been called not only *Occleve*, but *Occliffe*, as we find him in Chaucer's works.

A literary historian, who has read manuscripts with the eagerness which others do the last novelty, more careful than Warton, and more discriminate than Ritson, has, with honest intrepidity, confessed that "Occleve has not had his just share of reputation. His writings greatly assisted the growth of the popularity of our infant poetry *." Our historian has furnished from the manuscripts of Occleve testimonies of his assertion.

Among the six poems printed, one of considerable length exhibits the habits of a dissipated young gentleman in the fourteenth century.

Occleve for more than twenty years was a writer in the Privy Seal, where we find quarter-days were most irregular; and though briberies constantly flowed in, yet the golden shower passed over the heads of the clerks, dropping nothing into the hands of these innocents.

Our poet, in his usual passage from his "Chestres Inn by the Strond" to "Westminster Gate," by land or water—for "in the winter the way was deep," and "the Strand" was then what its name indicates—often was delayed by

> "The outward signe of Bacchus and his lure,
> That at his dore hangeth day by day,
> Exciteth Folk to taste of his moistúre
> So often that they cannot well say Nay!"

* Turner's History of England, v. 335.

There was another invitation for this susceptible writer of the Privy Seal.

"I dare not tell how that the fresh repaír
Of Venus femel, lusty children dear,
That so goodlý, so shapely were, and fair,
And so pleasánt of port and of manére."

There he loitered,

"To talk of mirth, and to disport and play."

He never "pinched" the taverners, the cooks, the boatmen, and all such gentry.

"Among this many in mine audience,
Methought I was ymade a man for ever—
So tickeled me that nyce reverénce,
That it me made larger of dispence;—
For Riot payeth largely ever mo;
He stinteth never till his purse be bare."

He is at length seized amid his jollities,

"By force of the penniless maladíe,
Ne lust * had none to Bacchus House to hie.
Fy! lack of coin departeth compaignie;
And hevé purse with Herté liberál
Quencheth the thirsty heat of Hertés drie,
Where chinchy Herté † hath thereof but small."

This "mirror of riot and excess" effected a discovery, and it was, that all the mischiefs which he recounts came from the high reports of himself which servants bring to their lord. The Losengour or pleasant flatterer was too lightly believed, and honied words made more harmful the deceitful error. Oh! babbling

* No desire. † Niggardly heart.

flattery! he spiritedly exclaims, author of all lyes, that causest all day thy lord to fare amiss. Such is the import of the following uncouth verse:—

"Many a servant unto his Lord saith
That all the world speaketh of him, Honoúr,
When the contrarie of that is sooth in faith;
And lightly leeved is this Losengoúr *,
His hony wordés wrapped in Erroúr,
Blindly conceived been, the more harm is.
O thou, FAVELE, of lesynges auctoúr †,
Causest all day thy Lord to fare amiss.
The Combre worldés ‡ 'clept been Enchantoúrs
In Bookes, as I have red——."

OCCLEVE was a shrewd observer of his own times. That this rhymer was even a playful painter of society we have a remarkable evidence preserved in the volume of his great master. "The Letter of Cupid," in the works of Chaucer, was the production of Occleve, and appears to have been overlooked by his modern critics.

* A Chaucerian word, which well deserves preservation in the language.

† FAVELL, author of Lyes. FAVELL, the editor of Hoccleve, explains as *cajolerie*, or flattery, by words given by Carpentier in his supplement to Du Cange. Favel is personified by Piers Ploughman, and in Skelton's Bouge of Court. FAVELE in langue Romane is Flattery—hence *Fabel*, Fabling.—*Roquefort's Dictionnaire*. The Italian FAVELLIO, parlerie, babil, caquet—*Alberti's Grand Dictionnaire*—does not wholly convey the idea of our modern *Humbug*, which combines *fabling* and *caquet*.

‡ The encumbrances to the world. In another poem he calls death, "that Coimbre-world." It was a favourite expression with him, taken from Chaucer. See Warton, ii. 352, note.

He had originally entitled it, "A Treatise of the Conversation of Men and Women in the Little Island of Albion." It is a caustic, "polite conversation;" and deemed so execrably good, as to have excited, as our ancient critic Speght tells, "such hatred among the gentlewomen of the Court, that Occleve was forced to recant in that boke of his called Planetas Proprius*." The Letter of Cupid is thus dated:—

> "Written in the lusty month of May,
> In our Paléis where many a million
> Of lovers true have habitatión,
> The yere of grace joyfull and jocúnd,
> A thousand four hundred and secónd."

Imagery and imagination are not required in the school of society. Occleve seems, however, sometimes to have told a tale not amiss, for WILLIAM BROWN, the pastoral bard, inserted entire a long story by old Occleve in his "Shepherd's Pipe." To us he remains sufficiently uncouth. The language had not at this period acquired even a syntax, though with all its rudeness it was neither wanting in energy nor copiousness, from that adoption of the French, the Provençal, and the Italian, with which Chaucer had enriched his vein. The present writer seems to have had some notions of the critical art, for he requests the learned

* A title which does not appear in the catalogue of his writings by Ritson, in his Bibliographia Poetica.

tutor of Prince Edward, afterwards Edward the Fourth, to warn him, when,—

"Metring amiss;"

and when

"He speaks unsyttingly,*"
"Or not by just peys † my sentence weigh,
And not to the order of enditing obey,
And my colours set ofté sythe awry."

We might be curious to learn, with all these notions of the suitable, the weighty, the order of enditing, and the colours often awry, whether these versifiers had really any settled principles of criticism. Occleve is a vernacular writer, bare of ornament. He has told us that he knew little of "Latin nor French," though often counselled by his immortal master. His enthusiastic love thus exults:—

"Thou wer't acquainted with Chaucer?—Pardie!
God save his soul!
The first findér of our faire langáge!"

There is one little circumstance more which connects the humble name of this versifier with that of Chaucer. His affectionate devotion to the great poet has been recorded by Speght in his edition of Chaucer. "Thomas Occleve, for the love he bare to his master, caused his picture to be truly drawn in his book *De Regimine Principis*, dedicated to Henry the Fifth."

* Unfittingly. † Weight; probably from the French *poids*.

In this manuscript, with "fond idolatry," he placed the portraiture of his master facing an invocation. From this portrait the head on the poet's monument was taken, as well as all our prints. It bears a faithful resemblance to the picture of Chaucer painted on board in the Bodleian Library. Had Occleve, with his feelings, sent us down some memorials of the poet and the man, we should have conned his verse in better humour; but the history of genius had not yet entered even into the minds of its most zealous votaries.*

* A single trait, however, has come down to us from that other scholar of Chaucer, whom we are next to follow. Lydgate assures us, from what he heard, that the great poet would not suffer petty criticisms "to perturb his reste." He did not like to groan over, and "pinch at every blot," but always "did his best."—

"My master Chaucer that founde ful many spot,
Hym lyste not gruche, nor pynch at every blot;
Nor move himself to perturb his reste;
I have perde tolde, but seyd alway his beste."

Lydgate's Troy.

LYDGATE; THE MONK OF BURY.

LYDGATE, the monk of Bury, was also the scholar of Chaucer: our monk had not passed a whole sequestered life in his Benedictine monastery; he had journeyed through France and Italy, and was familiar with the writings of Dante and Petrarch, and Boccaccio, and of Alain Chartier. The delectable catalogue of his writings, great and small, exceeds two hundred and fifty, and may not yet be complete, for they lie scattered in their manuscript state. A great multitude of writings, the incessant movements of a single mind, will at first convey to us a sense of magnitude; and in this magnitude if we observe the greatest possible diversity of parts, and, if we may use the term, the flashings of the most changeable contrasts, we must place such a universal talent among the phenomena of literature.

LYDGATE composed epics, which were the lasting favourites of two whole centuries — so long were classical repetitions of "Troy" and of "Thebes" not found irksome*. In his graver hours, he instructed the

* "The Troy Tale" was composed at the command of the King, Henry the Fifth; as "the Fall of Princes," from Boccace, was at the desire of Humphrey, the good Duke of Gloucester. He wrote regal poems for kings, while he dispersed wisdom and merriment for their subjects.

world by ethical descants, Æsopian fables, and quaint proverbs; fixed their wonder by saintly legends and veracious chronicles; and disported in amorous ditties, and many a merrie tale: translating or inventing, labour or levity, rounded the unconscious day of the versifying monk. We descend from the "Siege of Troy," a romance of nearly thirty thousand lines, which long graced the oriel window, to the freer vein of humour of "London Lick-penny," which opens the street-scenery of London in the fourteenth century, and "the Prioresse and her three Wooers," that exquisitely ludicrous narrative ballad for the people*.

Ritson, whose rabid hostility to the clerical character was part of his constitutional malady, whether it related to "a mendacious prelate," or "a stinking monk," after

* While this volume is passing through the press, "A Selection from the Minor Poems of Lydgate" has been edited by Mr. Halliwell. The versatility of Lydgate's poetical skill is advantageously shown in his comic satire, and his ethics drawn from a deep insight into human nature. The Editor suggests a new reading for the title of the ballad of "London *Lick-penny*," more suitable to the misadventures of its hero,—"London *Lack-penny;*" for London could not lick a penny from the forlorn hero who had not one to offer to it. GROSE, probably taken by the humorous designation, has placed it among his local proverbs.

The tale of the Prioress and her three Wooers is one of the happiest fabliaux. Mr. Campbell transcribed "the merrie tale" for his Specimens, when he discovered that a preceding forager had anticipated him in Mr. Jamieson, who has preserved it in his "Popular Ballads," i. 253.

having expended twenty pages in the mere enumeration of the titles of Lydgate's writings, heartlessly hints at the "cart-loads of rubbish of a voluminous poetaster; a prosaic and drivelling monk." And this is greedily seized on by the hand of the bibliographer. Percy, and Ellis too, mention DAN LYDGATE with contempt. Critics often find it convenient to resemble dogs by barking one after the other, without any other cause than the first bark of a brother, who had only bayed the moon. It now seemed concluded that the rhyming monk was to be dismissed for ever. A very credible witness, however, at last deposed that "Lydgate has been oftener abused than read*." And now, Mr. Hallam tells us that "GRAY, no light authority, speaks more favourably of Lydgate than either Warton or Ellis," and this nervous writer, with his accustomed correct discernment, has alleged a valid reason why Gray excelled them in this criticism; for "great poets have often the taste to discern, and the candour to acknowledge, those beauties which are latent amidst the tedious dulness of their humbler brethren."

Warton has, however, afforded three copious chapters on Lydgate, which are half as much as his enthusiasm bestowed on Chaucer. A Gothic monk, composing ancient romances, was a subject too congenial to have

* Turner's Hist. of England, v.

been neglected by the historian of our poetry, and he has limned and illuminated the feudal priest, with the love of the votary, who deemed, in his "lone-hours,"

> "Nor rough nor barren are the winding ways
> Of hoar Antiquity, but strown with flowers."

His miniature is exquisitely touched. "He was not only the poet of his monastery, but of the world in general. If a *disguising* was intended by the company of Goldsmiths; a *mask* before his majesty; a *may-game* for the sheriffs and aldermen of London; a *mumming* before the lord mayor; a procession of *pageants* for the festival of Corpus Christi, or a *carol* for the coronation; Lydgate was consulted, and gave the poetry*."

Mr. HALLAM objects that "the attention fails in the school-boy stories of Thebes and Troy—but it seems probable that Lydgate would have been a better poet in satire upon his own times, or delineation of their manners; themes which would have gratified us much more than the fate of princes."

This is relatively true; true as regards some of us,

* I may point out the raw material which our poetical antiquary has here worked up with such perfect effect in this picturesque enumeration. Appended to Speght's Chaucer, that editor furnished a very curious list of about a hundred works by Lydgate, which were in his own possession. Most of the singular poetical exhibitions here enumerated are mentioned towards the end of that list, and which Warton has happily appropriated, and so turned a dry catalogue into a poetical picture.

but not at all as respects Lydgate, nor the people of his age, nor the king and the princes who commanded themes congenial with their military character, and their simple tastes, romantically charming the readers of two centuries. If our critic, in the exercise of his energetic faculties, lives out of the necromancy of the old Romaunt, afar from Thebes and Troy, Thomas Warton was cradled among the children of fancy, and in his rovings had tasted their wild honey. The only works of Lydgate which attracted his attention, were precisely these tedious "Fate of Princes" and "the Troy Book."

The other modern critics, Ritson, Percy, and Ellis, had but a slight knowledge of DAN* LYDGATE. They have generally acted on the pressure of the moment, to get up a hasty court of *Pie-poudre*—that fugitive tribunal held at fairs—to determine on the case of a culprit even before he could shake the dust off

* DAN, as Ritson tells us, is a title given to the individuals of certain religious orders, from the barbarous Latin *Domnus*, a variation of *Dominus*, or the French *Dam* or *Dom*. *Dan* became a corruption of *Don* for *Dominus*. The title afterwards extended to persons of respectable condition, as vague as our complimentary esquire. It was applied to Chaucer by Spenser, and when obsolete it became jocular; for we have "Dan Cupid." Prior renewed it with ludicrous gravity when telling a tale which he had from "Dan Pope." It is still used in an honourable sense by the Spaniards in their DON.

their feet. But time calls for an arrest of hasty judgments, or brings forward some illustrious advocate to reverse the judicial decision, or set forth the misfortunes of the accused. Two, most eminent in genius, stand by the side of the monk of Bury, COLERIDGE and GRAY. Coleridge has left us his protest in favour of Lydgate, for he deeply regrets that in the general collection of our poets, the unpoetic editor "had not substituted *the whole of Lydgate's works from the manuscript extant*, for the almost worthless Gower*." Gray alone has taken an enlarged view of the state of our poetry and our language at this period. When that master-spirit abandoned the history of our poetry from his fastidious delicacy or from his learned indolence, because Warton had projected it, English literature sustained an irreparable loss†. In Gray surely we have lost a literary historian, such as the world has not yet had; so rare is that genius who happily combines qualities apparently incompatible. In his superior learning, his subtle taste, his deeper thought,

* Literary Remains, ii. 130.

† The great poet has left two or three most precious fragments; but these have long been buried in those ill-fated quartos, consisting chiefly of notes on Greek and on Plato, which Matthias published with extraordinary pomp; and, so he used to say, as a monument for himself as well as the bard—a monument which, his egregious self-complacency lived to witness, partook more of the properties of a tombstone than the glory of a column.

and his more vigorous sense, we should have found the elements of a more philosophical criticism, with a more searching and comprehensive intellect, than can be awarded to our old favourite THOMAS WARTON. In the neglected quartos of GRAY we discover that the poet had set earnestly to work on the archaiology of our poetry; we also find in his works those noble versions of the northern Scalds, and the Welsh bards, which he designed to have introduced into his history; thus to have impressed on us a perfect notion of a national poetry, by poetry itself; a rare good fortune, which does not enliven the toil of prosaic critics or verbal interpreters. Gray had found the manuscripts of Lydgate at Cambridge, and has made them a vehicle for the most beautiful disquisitions. On a passage in Lydgate, the poet-critic develops a curious occurrence in the history of the poetic art—namely, that proneness to minute circumstances which lengthens the strains of our elder poets, and which the impatience of modern taste rejects as tediousness; yet this will be found to be "the essence of poetry and oratory." This topic is important, and as I can neither add nor dare to take away from this perfect criticism, I submit to the task of transcribing what I am sure will come to most of my readers in all its freshness and novelty.

Our ancient poet seems to be apologising for telling

long stories, which he asserts cannot be told "in wordes few."

> "For a storye which is not plainly told,
> But constroyned under *wordes fewe*
> For lack of truth, wher they ben new or olde,
> Men by reporte cannot the matter shewe;
> These oakés greaté be not down yhewe
> First at a stroke, but by *a long prócesse;*
> Nor long stories a word may not expresse."
>
> LYDGATE, in his "*Fall of Princes.*"

On this Gray has delivered the following observations:—"These 'long processes' indeed suited wonderfully with the attention and simple curiosity of the age in which LYDGATE lived; many a *stroke* have he and the best of his contemporaries spent upon *a sturdy old story*, till they had blunted their own edge and that of their readers—at least a modern reader will find it so: but it is a folly to judge of the understanding and patience of those times by our own. They loved, I will not say tediousness, but *length* and a train of circumstances in a narration. The vulgar do so still: it gives an air of reality to facts; it fixes the attention; raises and keeps in suspense their expectation, and supplies the defects of their little and lifeless imagination; and it keeps pace with the slow motion of their own thoughts. Tell them a story as you would tell it to a man of wit; it will appear to them as an object seen in the night by a flash of lightning: but when you have placed it in

various lights and in various positions, they will come at last to see and feel it as well as others. But we need not confine ourselves to the vulgar and to understandings beneath our own. Circumstance ever was and ever will be the life and the essence both of oratory and of poetry. It has in some sort the same effect upon every mind that it has upon that of the populace; and I fear the *quickness and delicate impatience of these polished times* in which we live, are but the forerunners of the decline of all those beautiful arts which depend upon the imagination. Homer, the father of *circumstance*, has occasion for the same apology which I am making for Lydgate and for his predecessors*."

At the Monastery of Bury we might have listened to that Gothic monk's "goodly tale," or "notable proverb of Æsopus" for the nonce; or saintly legend, or "merrie balade;" or the story of "Thebes," which the scholar took up from his master Chaucer; or that from "Bochas" and Guido Colonna's "Troy-book:" but too numerous were the volumes to tell, and too voluminous was many a volume. Verbose and diffuse, yet clear and fluent, ran his phrase; too minutely copious were his descriptions, yet the delineations seemed the more graphical; his verse, too long or too short, halts in his measures till we fall into the minstrel's "metring,"

* Gray's Works by Matthias, ii. p. 60.

and lines break forth, beautiful as any in our day. He expands the same image, and loses all likeness in a prolix simile, for his readers were not so impatient as ourselves. These poets suffered or enjoyed a fatal facility of rhyming, lost for us, from the use of polysyllabic words from the French and the Latin accented on the last syllable, a custom continued by the Scots; and these provided them with too ready an abundance of poetic terminations or rhymes, tending to make their poems voluminous. The art of selection is the art of an age less florid and more fastidious, but not always more genial or more inventive. The pruning-hook was not in use when planters were too eager to gather the first fruits from the trees which their own hands had put into the earth.

Alas!—apologies only leave irremediable faults as they were! The tediousness of Dan Lydgate remains as languid, his verse as halting, and "Thebes" and "Troy" as desolate, as we found them!

Let us, however, be reminded, that he who wholly neglects the study of our ancient poets must submit to the loss of knowledge which a philosopher would value; the manners of the age, the modes of feeling, the stream of thought, the virgin fancies, and that position which the human character takes in distant ages—these will imbue his memory with the genius of

his country and the eternal truth of authentic nature. No English poet should wholly resign these masses of vernacular poetry to the lone closet of the antiquary; he who loves the gain of labour will excavate these quarries for their marble, for we know they are marble, since many a noble column has been raised from these shapeless and unhewed blocks.

THE INVENTION OF PRINTING.

PRINTING remained as long as its first artificers could keep it a secret and occult art; and it is the only one that ceaselessly operates all the miracles which the others had vainly promised.

Who first thought to carve the wooden immoveable letters on blocks?—to stamp the first sheet which ever was imprinted? Or who, second in invention, but first in utility, imagined to cast the metal with fusile types, separate from each other?—to fix this scattered alphabet in a form, and thus by one stroke write a thousand manuscripts, and, with the identical letters, multiply not a single work, but all sorts of works hereafter? Was it fortunate chance, or deliberate meditation, or both in gradual discovery, which produced this invention? In truth, we can neither detect the rude beginnings, nor hardly dare to fix on the beginners. The *Origines Typographicæ* are, even at this late hour, provoking a fierce controversy, not only among those who live in the shades of their libraries, but with honest burghers; for the glory of patriotism has connected itself with the invention of an art which came to us like a divine revelation in the history of man.

But the place, the mode, and the person—the invention and the inventor—are the subjects of volumes! Votaries of Fust, of Schöffer, of Gutenberg, of Costar! A sullen silence or a deadly feud is your only response. Ye jealous cities of Mentz, of Strasburg, and of Haarlem, each of ye have your armed champion at your gates*!

The mystical eulogist of the art of printing, who declared that "the invention came from Heaven," was not more at a loss to detect the origin than those who have sought for it among the earliest printers †. Learned but angry disputants on the origin of printing, what if the art can boast of no single inventor, and

* The city of Haarlem designs to erect a statue of COSTAR; thus publicly, in the eyes of Europe, to vindicate the priority of this Inventor of Typography. But a statue is not the final argument which, like the cannon of monarchs (that *ultima ratio regum*), will carry conviction on the spot it is placed. Mentz has already erected a statue of GUTENBERG. I have no doubt that, in the present state of agitation, both these statues will have much to say to one another, as the mystical Pasquin and Marforio of typography.

† "Some Observations on the Use and Original of the noble Art and Mystery of Printing, by F. Burges; Norwich, 1701." This is declared to be the first book printed at Norwich; where it appears that the establishment of a printing office, so late as in 1701, encountered a stern opposition from its sage citizens. The writer did not know that as far back as 1570 a Dutch printer had exercised the novel art by printing religious books for a community of Dutch emigrants who had taken refuge at Norwich, according to the recent discovery of Dr. Cotton in his "Typographical Gazetteer"—a volume abounding with the most vigorous researches.

was not the product of a single act? Consider the varieties of its practice, the change of wood to metal, the fixed to the moveable type; view the complexity of its machinery; repeated attempts must often have preceded so many inventions ere they terminated in the great one. From the imperfect and contradictory notices of the early essays—and of the very earliest we may have no record—we must infer that the art, though secret, was progressive, and that many imperfect beginnings were going on at the same time in different places.

Struck by the magnitude and the magnificence of the famous Bible of Fust, some have decided on the invention of the art by one of its most splendid results; this, however, is not in the usual course of human affairs, nor in the nature of things. "The Art of Printing," observes Dr. Cotton, in his introduction, "was brought almost to perfection in its infancy; so that, like Minerva, it may be said to have sprung to life, mature, vigorous, and armed for war." But in the article "Moguntia, or Mentz," this acute researcher states that "after all that has been written with such angry feelings upon the long-contested question of the *origin of the Art of Printing*, Mentz appears still to preserve the best-founded claim to the honour of being the *birth-place of the Typographic Art;* because," he adds, "the specimens adduced in favour of Haarlem and Strasburg,

even if we should allow their genuineness, are confessedly of *a rude and imperfect execution.*" We require no other evidence of the important fact, that the art, in its early stages, had to pass through many transitions—from the small school-books, or Donatuses, of Costar, to the splendid Bible of Fust. Had the art been borrowed or stolen from a single source, according to the popular tradition, the works would have borne a more fraternal resemblance, and have evinced less inferiority of execution; but if several persons at the same time were working in secrecy, each by his own method, their differences and their inferiority would produce "the rude and imperfect specimens." Mr. Hallam has suffered his strong emotion on the greatness of the invention to reflect itself back on the humble discoverers themselves; and, unusual with his searching inquiries, calls once more on Dr. Cotton's Minerva, but with a more celestial panoply. "The *high-minded inventors* of this great art tried, at *the very outset*, so bold a flight as the printing *an entire Bible*. It was Minerva leaping on earth, in her divine strength and radiant armour, ready at the moment of her nativity to subdue and destroy her enemies *." The Bible called the Mazarine Bible, thus distinguished from having been found in the Cardinal's library, re-

* Hallam's Introduction to the Literature of Europe, i. 211.

mains still a miracle of typography, not only for its type, but for the quality of the paper and the sparkling blackness of its ink *. The success of the art was established by this Bible; but the goldsmith Fust, who himself was no printer, was no otherwise "high-minded," than by the usurious prices he speculated on for this innocent imposture of vending what was now a printed book for a manuscript copy!

No refined considerations of the nature and the universal consequences of their discovery seem to have instigated the earliest printers; this is evident, by the perpetual jealousy and the mystifying style by which they long attempted to hide that secret monopoly which they had now obtained.

The first notions of printing might have reached Europe from China. Our first block-printing seems imitated from the Chinese, who print with blocks of wood on one side of the paper, as was done in the earliest essays of printing; and the Chinese seem also to have suggested the use of a thick black ink. European traders might have imported some fugitive leaves; their route has even been indicated, from Tartary, by the way of Russia; and from China and Japan, through the Indies and the Arabian Gulf. The great anti-

* Twenty copies of this famous Bible exist; one is preserved in our Royal Library.

quity of printing in China has been ascertained. Du Halde and the missionary Jesuits assert, that this art was practised by the Chinese half a century before the Christian era! At all events, it is evident that they exercised it many centuries before it was attempted in Europe. The history of gunpowder would illustrate the possibility of the same extraordinary invention occurring at distinct periods. Roger Bacon indicated the terrible ingredients a hundred years before the monk Schwartz, about 1330, actually struck out the fiery explosion, and had the glory of its invention. Machines to convey to a distance the thunder and the lightning described by their discoverers were not long after produced. But it would have astonished these inventors to have learnt, that guns had been used as early as the year 85 A.D., and that the fatal powder had been invented previously by the Chinese. Well might the philosophical Langles be struck by "the singular coincidence of the invention in Europe of the compass, of gunpowder, and of printing, about the same period, within a century." These three mighty agents in human affairs have been traced to that wary and literary nation, who, though they prohibit all intercourse with "any barbarian eye," might have suffered these sublime inventions to steal away over "their great wall."

What has happened to the art of printing also occurred to the sister-art of engraving on copper. Tradition had ascribed the invention as the accidental discovery of the goldsmith Maso Finiguerra. But the Germans insist that they possess engravings before the days of the Italian artist; and it is not doubtful that several of the compatriots of Finiguerra were equally practising the art with himself. Heinecken would arbitrate between the jealous patriots; he concedes that Vasari might ascribe the invention of the art in Italy to Finiguerra, yet that engraving might have been practised in Germany, though unknown in Italy. Buonarotti, the great judge of all art, was sensible that in this sort of invention every artist makes his own discoveries. Alluding to the art of engraving, he says, "It would be sufficient to occasion our astonishment, that the ancients did not discover the art of chalcography, were it not known that DISCOVERIES OF THIS SORT generally occur ACCIDENTALLY to the mechanics in the exercise of their calling *." On this principle we may confidently rest. All the early printers, like the rivals of Finiguerra at home, and his unknown concurrents in Germany, were proceeding with the same art, and might urge their distinct claims.

The natural magic of concave and convex lenses,

* Ottley's "Inquiry into the Early History of Engraving."

those miracles of optical science, one of which searches Nature when she eludes the eye, and the other approximates the remotest star—the microscope and the telescope; who were their inventors, and how have those inventions happened? These instruments appeared about the same time. The Germans ascribe the invention of the microscope to a Dutchman, one Drebell; while the Neapolitan Fontana claims the anterior invention; but which Viviani, the scholar of Galileo, asserts, from his own knowledge, was presented to the king of Poland by that father of modern philosophy, long anterior to the date fixed on by the Germans. The history of the telescope offers a similar result. Fracastorius may have accidentally combined two lenses; but he neither specified the form nor the quality; and in these consisted the real discovery, which we find in Baptista Porta, and which subsequently was perfected by Galileo. The invention of the art of printing seems a parallel one. It appeared in various quarters about the same time; and in the process of successive attempts, by intimation, by conjecture, and by experiment, each artificer insensibly advanced into a more perfect invention; till some fortunate claimant for the discovery puts aside all preceding essayists, who, not without some claims to the invention, leave their advocates in another generation to

dispute about their rights, which are buried in oblivion, or falsified by traditional legends.

Thus it has happened, that obscure traditions envelop the origin of some of the most interesting inventions. Had these ingenious discoveries been as simple and as positive as their historians oppositely maintain, these origins had not admitted of such interminable disputes. We may, therefore, reasonably suspect that the practitioners in every art which has reached to almost a perfect state, such as that of printing, have silently borrowed from one another; that there has often existed a secret connexion in things, and a reciprocal observation in the intercourse of men alike intent on the same object; that countries have insensibly transferred a portion of their knowledge to their neighbours; that travellers in every era have imparted their novelties, hints however crude, descriptions however imperfect; all such slight notices escape the detection of an historian; nothing can reach him but the excellence of some successful artist. In vain rival concurrents dispute the invention; the patriotic historian of the art clings to his people or his city, to fix the inventor and the invention, and promulgates fairy tales to authenticate the most uncertain evidence *.

* Dr. WETTER of Mentz has lately shown, that, contrary to the common opinion, Gutenberg himself printed long with *wooden*

The history of printing illustrates this view of its origin. The invention has been long ascribed to GUTENBERG, yet some have made it doubtful whether this presumed father of the art ever succeeded in printing a book, for we are assured that no colophon has revealed his name. We hear of his attempts, and of his disappointments, his bickerings and his law-suits. He seems to have been a speculative bungler in a new-found art, which he mysteriously hinted was to make a man's fortune. The goldsmith Fust advanced a capital in search of the novel alchymy—the project ends in a law-suit, the goldsmith gains his cause, and the projector is discharged. Gutenberg lures another simple soul, and the same golden dream vanishes in the dreaming. These copartners, evidently tired of an art which had not yet found an artist, a young man, probably improving on Gutenberg's blunders, one happy day displayed to the eyes of his master, Fust, a

blocks; and that, instead of the invention of moveable types having been the result of long study, *it arose out of a "sudden fancy."*

How the Doctor has authenticated "the sudden fancy," I know not, but the apotheosis has passed. In three successive days, in the month of August 1837, all Mentz congregated to worship the statue, by Thorwaldsen, of their ancient citizen in the square that henceforward bears his name. A chorus of 700 voices resounded the laud of the German printer; the flags in the regatta waved to his honour; and the festival rejoiced the city: and when the figure of Gutenberg was unveiled, the artillery, the music, and the people's voices, blending together, seemed to echo in the skies.

proof pulled from his own press. In rapture, the master confers on this Peter Schœffer a share of his future fortunes; and to bind the apprentice by the safest ties of consanguinity, led the swart youth, glorious with printer's ink, to the fair hand of his young daughter. The new partnership produced their famed Psalter of 1457; and shortly followed their magnificent Bible.

While these events were occurring, COSTAR, of Haarlem, was plodding on with the same "noble mystery," but only printing on one side of a leaf, not having yet discovered that a leaf might be contrived to contain two pages. The partisans of Costar assert that it was proved he substituted moveable for fixed letters; which was a giant's footstep in this new path. A faithless servant ran off with the secret. The history of printing abounds with such tales. Every step in the progress of the newly-invented art indicates its gradual accessions. The numbering of the pages was not thought of for a considerable time; the leaves were long only distinguished by letters or signatures—a custom still preserved, though apparently superfluous.

There is something attractive for rational curiosity in the earliest beginnings of every art; every slight improvement, even though trivial, has its motive, and supplies some want. On this principle the history

of punctuation enters into the history of literature. Caxton had the merit of introducing the Roman pointing as used in Italy; and his successor, Pinson, triumphed by domiciliating the Roman letter. The dash, or perpendicular line, thus, | was the only punctuation they used. It was, however, discovered that "the craft of poynting well used makes the sentence very light." The more elegant comma supplanted the long uncouth | ; the colon was a refinement, "showing that there is more to come." But the semicolon was a Latin delicacy which the obtuse English typographer resisted. So late as 1580 and 1590 treatises on orthography do not recognise any such innovator; the Bible of 1592, though printed with appropriate accuracy, is without a semicolon; but in 1633 its full rights are established by Charles Butler's English Grammar. In this chronology of the four points of punctuation it is evident that Shakespeare could never have used the semicolon; a circumstance which the profound George Chalmers mourns over, opining that semicolons would often have saved the poet from his commentators.

FUST had bound his workmen to secrecy by the solemnity of an oath; but at the siege of Mentz that freemasonry was lost. These early printers dispersed, some were even bribed away. Two Germans set up their

press in the monastery of Subiaco, in the vicinity of Naples, whose confraternity consisted of German monks. These very printers finally retreated to Rome, for that patronage they had still to seek; and at Rome they improved the art by adopting the Roman character. Not only the invention of the art was progressive, but the art itself was much more so.

We have other narratives of printers romantically spirited away from the parent-presses; one of the most extraordinary is the history of printing set up at Oxford, ten years before the art was practised in Europe, except at Haarlem and Mentz. Henry VI., by advice of the Archbishop of Canterbury, despatched a confidential agent in disguise, under the guidance of Caxton, in his trading journeys to Flanders. The Haarlemites were so jealous of idling strangers who had come on the same insidious design, that foreigners had frequently been imprisoned.

The royal agent never ventured to enter the city, but by heavy bribes in a secret intercourse with the workmen, one dark night he smuggled a printer aboard a vessel, and carried away Frederick Corsellis. That printer, on landing in England, was attended by a guard to Oxford. There he was constantly watched till he had revealed the mysterious craft. The evidence of this unheard-of history hinged on a record at Lam-

beth-palace authenticating the whole narrative, and on a monument of Corsellis' art, which any one might inspect at the Bodleian, being a book bearing a date six years prior to any printing by Caxton. The record at Lambeth, however, was never found, and never heard of, and the date of the book might have been accidentally or designedly falsified. An x dropped in the date of the impression would account for the singularity of a book printed before our Caxton had acquired the art. The tale long excited a sharp controversy, when Corsellis at Oxford was considered as the first printer in England. The possibility of the existence of this person at Oxford, and even of the book he printed, appears by a lively investigation of Dr. Cotton*; and I have been assured of a circumstance which, if true, would render the story of Corsellis probable; it is that a family of this name may still be found in Oxfordshire. The whole history has, however, by some been considered as supposititious, standing on the single evidence of a Sir Richard Atkyns, a servile lawyer and royalist of no great character in the days of Charles the Second†.

* Dr. Cotton's curious "Typographical Gazetteer," art. OXONIA. Of a class of the earliest printed books, having no printer's name, he observes, "These may have been printed by Corsellis, or any one else."

† Atkyns on the Original and Growth of Printing. This quarto pamphlet is highly valued among collectors for Loggan's beautiful

Grafting his tale on the accident of the date of this book, he had a covert design, to maintain a theory or a right that printing was "a flower of the crown," constituting the sovereign the printer of England! all others being his servants. This enormous prevention of the abuses of the press was not deemed too extravagant for those desperate times.

The only certainty in the history of printing, after all the fables of its origin, is its native place. It is a German romance enlivened by some mysterious adventures, wanting only the opening pages, which no one can supply*. Even the most philosophic of bibliographers, Daunou, utters a cry of despair, and moreover, at this late day, seems at a loss to decide on the nature of the influence of the art of printing! "We live too near the epoch of the discovery of printing to judge accurately of its influence, and too far from it to know the circumstances which gave birth to it." Our sage

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print of Charles the Second, Archbishop Shelden, and General Monk. Dr. Middleton refuted this ridiculous tale of an ideal printer, one Corsellis, in his "Dissertation on the Origin of Printing in England," first published 1735, and which now may be seen in his Works.

* The fourth day of the "Bibliographical Decameron" of Dr. Dibdin exhibits an ample view of the pending controversies on the *Origines Typographicæ*. Every bibliographer has his favourite hero. The reader will observe that I have none! And yet possibly my tale may be the truest.

seems to think that another cycle of at least a thousand years must pass away ere we can decide on the real influence of printing over the destinies of man: this new tree of knowledge bears other fruit than that of its own sweetness, source of good and evil, of sense and of nonsense! whence we pluck the windy fruitage of opinions, crude and changeable!

How has it happened that such a plain story as that of the art of printing should have sunk into a romance? Solely because the monopolisers dreaded discovery. It originated in deception, and could only flourish for their commercial spirit in mysterious obscurity. Among the first artisans of printing every one sought to hide his work, and even to blind the workmen. After their operations they cautiously unscrewed the four sides of their forms, and threw the scattered type beneath, for, as one craftily observed to his partner, "When the component parts of the press are in pieces, no one will understand what they mean." One of the early printers of the fifteenth century at Mutina, or Modena, professes his press to have been *in ædibus subterraneis* —doubtless, if possible, still further to darken the occult mystery. They delivered themselves in a mystical style when they alluded to their unnamed art, and impressed on the marvelling reader that the volume he held in his hand was the work of some supernatural

agency. They announced that the volumes in this newly-found art were "neither drawn, nor written with a pen and ink, as all books before had been." In the "Recuyel of the Historyes of Troye," our honest printer, plain Caxton, caught the hyperbolical style of the dark monopolising spirit of the confraternity. I give his words, having first spelt them. "I have practised and learned at my great charge and dispense to ordain (put in order) this said book in print after the manner and form as ye may here see, and is not written with pen and ink as other books be, to the end that *every man may have them* AT ONCE; for all the books of this story, thus imprinted as ye see, were *begun in one day, and also finished in one day.*" A volume of more than seven hundred folio pages, "begun and finished in one day," was not the less marvellous for being impossible. But for the times was the style! Caxton would keep up the wonder and the mystery of an art which men did not yet comprehend; and because a whole sheet might have been printed in one day, and was *all at once* pulled off, and not line by line, our venerable printer mystified the world. And all this was said at a time when so slow was the process of transcription, that one hundred Bibles could not be procured under the expense of seven thousand days, or of nearly twenty years' labour. Honest men, too eager in

their zeal, particularly when their personal interests are at stake, sometimes strain truth on the tenter-hooks of fiction. The false miracle which our primeval printer professed he had performed we seem to have realised: it is amusing to conceive the wonderment of Caxton, were he now among us, to view the steam working that cylindrical machine which disperses the words of a speaker throughout the whole nation, when the voice which uttered them is still lingering on our ear!

THE FIRST ENGLISH PRINTER.

THE ambitious wars of a potent aristocracy inflicted on this country half a century of public misery. Our fields were a soil of blood; and maternal England long mourned for victories she obtained over her own children—lord against lord, brother against brother, and the son against the father. Rival administrations alternately dispossess each other by sanguinary conflict; a new monarch attaints the friends of his predecessor; conspiracy rises against conspiracy—scaffold against scaffold; the king is re-enthroned—the king perishes in the Tower; York is triumphant—and York is annihilated.

Few great families there were, who had not immolated their martyrs or their victims; and it frequently occurred that the same family had fallen equally on both sides, for it was a war of the aristocracy with the aristocracy: "Save the commons and kill the captains," was the general war-cry. The distracted people were perhaps indifferent to the varying fortunes of the parties, accustomed as they were to behold after each battle the heads of lords and knights raised on every bridge and gate.

During this dread interval, all things about us were thrown back into a state of the rudest infancy: the illiterature of the age approached to barbarism; the evidences of history were destroyed; there was such a paucity of readers, that no writers were found to commemorate contemporary events. Indeed, had there been any, who could have ventured to arbitrate between such contradictory accounts, where every party had to tell their own tale? Oblivion, not history, seemed to be the consolation of those miserable times.

It was at such an unhappy æra that the new-found art of printing was introduced into England by an English trader, who, for thirty years, had passed his life in Flanders, conversant with no other languages than were used in those countries.

Our literature was interested in the intellectual character of our first English printer. A powerful mind might by the novel and mighty instrument of thought have created a national taste, or have sown that seed of curiosity without which no knowledge can be reared. Such a genius might have anticipated by a whole century that general passion for sound literature which was afterwards to distinguish our country. But neither the times nor the man were equal to such a glorious advancement.

The first printed book in the English language was

not printed in England. It is a translation of Ráoul le Fevre's "Recuyel of the Historyes of Troye," famed in its own day as the most romantic history, and in ours, for the honour of bibliography, romantically valued at the cost of a thousand guineas. This first monument of English printing issued from the infant press at Cologne in 1471, where Caxton first became initiated in "the noble mystery and craft" of printing, when printing was yet truly "a mystery," and Caxton himself did not import the art which was to effect such an intellectual revolution till a year or two afterwards, on his return home. The first printer, it is evident, had no other conception of the machine he was about to give the nation than as an ingenious contrivance, or a cheap substitute for costly manuscripts—possibly he might, in his calculating prudence, even be doubtful of its success!

At the announcement of the first printed book in our vernacular idiom, the mind involuntarily pauses: looking on the humble origin of our bibliography, and on the obscure commencement of the newly-found art of printing itself, we are startled at the vast and complicate results.

The contemporaries of our first printer were not struck by their novel and precious possession, of which they participated in the first fruits in the circulation

and multiplication of their volumes. The introduction of the art into England is wholly unnoticed by the chroniclers of the age, so unconscious they were of this new implement of the human mind. We find Fabian, who must have known Caxton personally—both being members of the Mercers' Company—passing unnoticed his friend; and instead of any account of the printing-press, we have only such things as "a new weather-cock placed on the cross of St. Paul's steeple." Hall, so copious in curious matters, discovered no curiosity to memorialise in the printing-press; Grafton was too heedless; and Holinshed, the most complete of our chroniclers, seems to have had an intention of saying something by his insertion of a single line, noticing the name of "Caxton as the first practiser of the art of printing;" but he was more seriously intent in the same paragraph to give a narrative of "a bloody rain, the red drops falling on the sheets which had been hanged to dry." The history of printing in England has been vainly sought for among English historians; so little sensible were they to those expansive views and elevated conceptions, which are now too common-place eulogies to repeat.

By what subdolous practices among the first inventors of this secret art Caxton obtained its mastery, we are not told, except that he learnt the new art "at his

own great cost and expense;" and on his final return home, he was accompanied by foreigners who lived in his house, and after his death became his successors. Wynkyn de Worde, Pinson, Machlinia and others, by their names betray their German origin. We have recently discovered that we had even a French printer who printed English books. Francis Regnault (or Reynold, anglicised) was a Frenchman who fell under the displeasure of the Inquisition for printing the Bible in English. He resided in England, and had in hand a number of primers in English and other similar books, which at length excited the jealousy of *the Company of Booksellers in London*—in the reign of Henry the Eighth. To lay this bibliopolic storm, the affrightened French printer, with all his stock in hand, procured Coverdale and Grafton to intercede with Cromwell to grant him a licence to sell what he had already printed, engaging hereafter "to print no more in the *English tongue* unless he have an *Englishman* that is learned to be his corrector;" and further, he offers to cancel and reprint any faulty leaf again*.

Caxton did not extend his views beyond those of a mercantile printer and an indifferent translator. As a writer, Caxton had reason to speak with humility of the style of his vernacular versions. His patroness,

* State Papers of Henry the Eighth, Vol. i. 589.

the Lady Margaret, sister to our Edward the Fourth, and duchess of Burgundy, after inspecting some quires of his translation of the "Recuyel of the Historyes of Troye," returned them, finding, as Caxton ingenuously acknowledges, "some defaut in his English which she commanded him to amend." Tyrwhit sarcastically observes, that the duchess might have been a purist. As we are not told what were these "defauts," we cannot decide on the good taste or the fastidiousness of the sister of Edward the Fourth. But the duchess was not the only critic whom Caxton had to encounter, for we learn by his preface to his "Boke of Æneydos compiled by Virgil," now metamorphosed into a barbarous French prose romance, and the French translation translated, that there were "gentlemen who of late have blamed me that in my translations I had over-curious terms which could not be understood by common people. I fain would satisfy every man." He apologises for his own style by alleging the unsettled state of the English language, of which he tells us that "the language now used varieth far from that which was used and spoken when I was born." An absence of thirty years from his native land did not improve a diction which originally had been none of the purest. We find in his translations an abundance of pure French words, and it is remarkable that the printer of the third

edition of the Troy history, in 1607, altered whole sentences "into plainer English," alleging, "the translator, William Caxton, being, *as it seemeth*, no Englishman!"

The "curious" prices now given among the connoisseurs of our earliest typography, for their "Caxtons," as his Gothic works are thus honourably distinguished, have induced some, conforming to traditional prejudice, to appreciate by the same fanciful value "the Caxtonian style." But though we are not acquainted with the "defauts" which offended the Lady Margaret, nor with the "terms which were not easily understood," as alleged by "the gentlemen," nor with "the sentences improperly Englished," as the later printer declared, we shall not, I suspect, fall short of the mark if we conclude that the style of a writer destitute of a literary education, a prolix genius with a lax verbosity, and almost a foreigner in his native idiom, could not attain to any skill or felicity in the maternal tongue.

As a printer, without erudition, Caxton would naturally accommodate himself to the tastes of his age, and it was therefore a consequence that no great author appears among "the Caxtons." The most glorious issues of his press were a Chaucer and a Gower, wherein he was simply a printer. The rest of his works are

translations of fabulous histories, and those spurious writings of the monkish ages ascribed by ignorant transcribers to some ancient sage. He appears frequently to have been at a loss what book to print, and to have accidentally chosen the work in hand; so he tells us—"Having no work in hand, I sitting in my study, where as lay many diverse paunflettes and bookys, happened that to my hand came a lytel boke in French, which late was translated out of Latin by some noble clerk of France, which book is named Æneydos." And this was the origin of his peurile romance! He exercised no discrimination in his selection of authors, and the simplicity of our first printer far exceeded his learning. One of his greater works is "The noble History of King Arthur and of certain of his Knights." Caxton, who had charmed himself and his ignorant readers with his authentic "Æneydos," hesitated to print "this history," for there were different opinions that "there was no such Arthur, and that all such books as be made of him be but feigned and fables." It would be difficult to account for the scepticism of one who always found the marvellous more delectable than the natural, and who had published so many "feigned" histories—as "The veray trew History of the valiant Knight Jason," or the "Life of Hercules," and all "The Merveilles of Virgil's Necromancy," solemnly vouching for their

verity! His sudden scruples were, however, relieved, when "a gentleman" assured our printer that "it was great folly and blindness in the disbelievers of this true history."

In the early stage of civilisation men want knowledge to feel any curiosity; like children, they are only affected through the medium of their imagination. But it is a phenomenon in the history of the human mind, that at a period of refinement we may approximate to one of barbarism. This happens whenever the ruling passion wholly returns to fiction, and thus terminates in a reckless disregard for all other studies. Whenever history, severe and lofty, displaying men as they are, is degraded among the revels and the masques of romance; and the slow inductions of reasoning, and the minute discoveries of research, and the nice affinities of analogy, are impatiently rejected, while fiction in her exaggerated style swells every object into a colossal size, and raises every passion into hyperbolical violence; a distaste for knowledge, and a coldness for truth, which must follow, are fatal to the sanity of the intellect. And thus in the day of our refinement we may be reverting to our barbarous infancy.

Caxton, mindful of his commercial interests and the tastes of his readers, left the glory of restoring the classical writers of antiquity, which he could not read, to

the learned printers of Italy*. The Orator of Cicero, the histories of Herodotus and Polybius, the ethics of Seneca, and the elaborate volumes of St. Austin, were some of the rich fruits of the early typography of the German printers who had conveyed their new art to the Neapolitan monastery of Subiaco. Our English printer, indeed, might have heard of their ill-fortune, when, in a petition to the Pope, they sent forth this cry—"Our house is full of proof-sheets, but we have nothing to eat!" The trivial productions from Caxton's press, romantic or religious legends, and treatises on hunting and hawking, and the moralities of the game of chess, with Reynard the Fox, were more amusing to the ignorant readers of his country; but the national genius was little advanced by a succession of "merveillous workes;" nor would the crude unformed tastes of the readers be matured by stimulating their inordinate appetites. The first printing-press in England did not serve to raise the national taste out of its barbarous infancy. Caxton was not a genius to soar beyond his

* We have Caxton's own confession in his preface to "The Book of Æneydos," or the Æneid of Virgil, where, in soliciting the late-created poet-laureat in the University of Oxford, John Skelton, to oversee his prose translation of the French translation, he notices the translations of Skelton of "The Epistles of Tully, and the History of Diodorus Siculus, *out of Latin into English*," and as "one that had read Virgil, Ovid, Tully, and all the other noble poets and orators to *me unknown*."

age, but he had the industry to keep pace with it, and with little judgment and less learning he found no impediment in his selection of authors or his progress in translation.

Our earliest printed works consist of these translations of French translations; and the historian of our poetry considered that this very circumstance, which originated in the general illiteracy of the times, was more favourable to our vernacular literature than would have been the publication of Roman writers in their original language. Had it not been for these French versions, Caxton could not have furnished any of his own. The multiplication of English copies multiplied English readers, and when at length there was a generation of readers, an English press induced many to turn authors who were only qualified to write in their native tongue.

Venerable shade of Caxton! the award of the tribunal of posterity is a severe decision but an imprescriptible law! Men who appear at certain æras of society, however they be lauded for what they have done, are still liable to be censured for not doing what they ought to have done. Patriarch of the printing-press! who to thy last and dying day withdrew not thy hand from thy work, it is hard that thou shouldst be amenable to a law which thy faculties were not ade-

quate to comprehend; surely thou mayst triumph, thou simple man! amid the echoes of thy "Caxtonians" rejoicing over thy Gothic leaves—but the historian of the human mind is not the historian of typography.

EARLY LIBRARIES.

THERE probably was a time when there existed no private libraries in the kingdom, nor any save the monastic; that of Oxford, at the close of the thirteenth century, consisted of "a few tracts kept in chests." In that primeval age of book-collecting, shelves were not yet required. Royalty itself seems to have been destitute of a royal library. It appears, by one of our recently published records, that King John borrowed a volume from a rich abbey, and the King gave a receipt to Simon his Chancellor for "the book called Pliny," which had been in the custody of the Abbot and Convent of Reading. "The Romance of the History of England," with other volumes, have also royal receipts. The King had either deposited these volumes for security with the Abbot, or, what seems not improbable, had no established collection which could be deemed a library, and, as leisure or curiosity stimulated, commanded the loan of a volume.

The borrowing of a volume was a serious concern in those days, and heavy was the pledge or the bond required for the loan. One of the regulations of the library of the Abbey of Croyland Ingulphus has given.

It regards "the lending of their books, as well the smaller without pictures as the larger with pictures;" any loan is forbidden under no less a penalty than that of excommunication, which might possibly be a severer punishment than the gallows.

Long after this period, our English libraries are said to have been smaller than those on the Continent; and yet, one century and a half subsequently to the reign of John, the royal library of France, belonging to a monarch who loved literature, Jean le Bon, did not exceed ten volumes. In those days they had no idea of establishing a library; the few volumes which each monarch collected, at great cost, were always dispersed by gifts or bequests at their death; nothing passed to their successor but the missals, the *heurres*, and the *offices* of their chapels. These monarchs of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, amid the prevailing ignorance of the age, had not advanced in their comprehension of the uses of a permanent library beyond their great predecessor of the ninth, for Charlemagne had ordered his books to be sold after his death, and the money given to the poor.

Yet among these early French Kings there were several who were lovers of books, and were not insensible of the value of a studious intercourse, anxious to procure transcribers and translators. A curious fact

has been recorded of St. Louis, that, during his crusade in the East, having learned that a Saracen prince employed scribes to copy the best writings of philosophy for the use of students, on his return to France he adopted the same practice, and caused the Scriptures and the works of the Fathers to be transcribed from copies found in different abbeys. These volumes were deposited in a secure apartment, to which the learned might have access; and he himself passed much of his time there, occupied in his favourite study, the writings of the Fathers*.

Charles le Sage, in 1373, had a considerable library, amounting to nine hundred volumes. He placed this collection in one of the towers of the Louvre, hence denominated the "Tour de la Librarie," and entrusted it to the custody of his valet-de-chambre, Gilles Malet, constituting him his librarian†. He was no common

* Essai Historique sur la Bibliothèque du Roi, par M. Le Prince.

† This Gilles Malet, who was also the king's reader, had great strength of character; he is thus described by Christine de Pise:— "Souverainement bien lisoit, et bien ponttoit, et entendens homs estoit;" "he read sovereignly well, with good punctuation, and was an understanding man." She has recorded a personal anecdote of him. One day a fatal accident happened to his child, but such was the discipline of official duties, that he did not interrupt his attendance on the king at the usual hour of reading. The king having afterwards heard of the accident which had bereaved the father of his child, observed, "If the intrepidity of this man had not exceeded

personage, for, great as was the care and ingenuity required, he drew up an inventory with his own hand of this royal library. In that early stage of book-collecting, volumes had not always titles to denote their subjects, or they contained several in one volume*; hence they are described by their outsides, their size, and their shape, their coverings and their clasps. This library of Charles the Fifth shines in extreme splendour, with its many-coloured silks and velvets, azure and vermeil, green and yellow, and its cloths of silver and of gold, each volume being distinctly described by the colour and the material of its covering. This curious document of the fourteenth century still exists†.

This library passed through strange vicissitudes. The volumes in the succeeding reigns were seized on, or purchased at a conqueror's price, by the Duke of Bedford, Regent of France. Some he gave to his brother Humphrey, the Duke of Gloucester, and they formed a part of the rich collection which that

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that which nature bestows upon ordinary men, his paternal emotion would not have allowed him to conceal his misfortune."

* The reader may form some idea of the discordant arrangement of a volume of manuscripts by the following entries—"Un Livre qui commence de Genesis, et aussi traite des fais Julius Cesar, appelle Suetoine."—"Un Livre en François, en un volume, qui ce commence de Genesis, et traite du fait des Romains, de la vie des SS. Peres Hermites, et de Merlin."

† Hist. de l'Académie Royale des Inscriptions, tome i. 421, 12mo.

prince presented to Oxford, there finally to be destroyed by a fanatical English mob; others of the volumes found their way back to the Louvre, repurchased by the French at London. The glorious missal that bears the Regent's name remains yet in this country, the property of a wealthy individual.

Accident has preserved a few catalogues of libraries of noblemen in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, more pleasant than erudite. In the fourteenth century, the volumes consisted for the greater part of those romances of chivalry, which so long formed the favourite reading of the noble, the dame and the damoiselle, and all the lounging damoiseaux in the baronial castle*.

The private libraries of the fifteenth century were restricted to some French tomes of chivalry, or to "a merrie tale in Boccacce;" and their science advanced not beyond "The Shepherd's Calendar," or "The Secrets of Albert the Great." There was an intermixture of legendary lives of saints and apocryphal adventures of "Notre Seigneur" in Egypt; with a volume or two of physic and surgery and astrology.

A few catalogues of our monastic libraries still remain, and these reflect an image of the studies of the

* *Dame* was the lady of the knight; the *Damoiselle*, the wife of an esquire; *Damcisel*, or *Damoiseau*, was a youth of noble extraction, but who had not yet attained to knighthood.—*Rocquefort, Glossaire de la Langue Romane.*

middle ages. We find versions of the Scriptures in English and Latin—a Greek or Hebrew manuscript is not noted down; a commentator, a father, and some schoolmen; and a writer on the canon law, and the mediæval Christian poets who composed in Latin verse. A romance, an accidental classic, a chronicle and legends—such are the usual contents of these monastic catalogues. But though the subjects seem various, the number of volumes was exceedingly few. Some monasteries had not more than twenty books. In such little esteem were any writings in the vernacular idiom held, that the library of Glastonbury Abbey, probably the most extensive in England, in 1248, possessed no more than four books in English*, on common religious topics; and in the later days of Henry the Eighth, when Leland rummaged the monasteries, he did not find a greater number. The library of the monastery of Bretton, which, owing to its isolated site, was among the last dissolved, and which may have enlarged its stores with the spoils of other collections which the times offered, when it was dissolved in 1558, could only boast of having possessed one hundred and fifty distinct works †.

* Ritson's Dissertation on Romance and Minstrelsy, lxxxi.

† See an Essay on English Monastic Libraries, by that learned and ingenious antiquary, the Rev. Joseph Hunter.

In this primitive state of book-collecting, a singular evidence of their bibliographical passion was sometimes apparent in the monastic libraries. Not deeming a written catalogue, which might not often be opened, sufficiently attractive to remind them of their lettered stores, they inscribed verses on their windows to indicate the books they possessed, and over these inscriptions they placed the portraits of the authors. Thus they could not look through their windows without being reminded of their volumes; and the very portraits of authors, illuminated by the light of heaven, might rouse the curiosity which many a barren title would repel*.

To us accustomed to reckon libraries by thousands, these scanty catalogues will appear a sad contraction of human knowledge. The monastic studies could not in any degree have advanced the national character; they could only have kept it stationary; and, excepting some scholastic logomachies, in which the people could have no concern, one monkish writer could hardly ever have differed from another.

The monastic libraries have been declared to have afforded the last asylums of literature in a barbarous

* Some of these extraordinary window-catalogues of the Monastic Library of St. Alban's were found in the cloisters and presbytery of that monastery, and are preserved in the *Monasticon Anglicanum*.

æra; and the preservation of ancient literature has been ascribed to the monks: but we must not accept a fortuitous occurrence as any evidence of their solicitude or their taste. In the dull scriptorium of the monk, if the ancient authors always obtained so secure a place, they slept in comparative safety, for they were not often disturbed by their first Gothic owners, who hardly ever allude to them. If ancient literature found a refuge in the monastic establishments, the polytheistical guests were not slightly contemned by their hosts, who cherished with a different taste a bastardised race of the Romans. The purer writers were not in request; for the later Latin verse-makers being Christians, the piety of the monks proved to be infinitely superior to their taste. Boethius was their great classic; while Prudentius, Sedulius, and Fortunius, carried the votes against Virgil, Horace, and even Ovid; though Ovid was in some favour for his marvellous Romance. The polytheism of the classical poets was looked on with horror, so literally did they construe the allegorical fables of the Latin muse. Even till a later day, when monkery itself was abolished, the same Gothic taste lingered among us in its aversion to the classical poets of antiquity, as the works of idolaters!

Had we not obtained our knowledge of the great ancients by other circumstances than by their accidental

preservation by the monks, we should have lost a whole antiquity. The vellum was considered more precious than the genius of the author; and it has been acutely conjectured that the real cause of the minor writers of antiquity having come down to us entire, while we have to lament for ever the lacerations of the greater, has been owing to the scantiness of the parchment of a diminutive volume. They coveted the more voluminous authors to erase some immortal page of the lost decades of Livy, or the annals of Tacitus, to inscribe on it some dull homily or saintly legend. That the ancients were neglected by these guardians appears by the dungeon-darkness from which the Italian Poggio disinterred many of our ancient classics; and Leland, in his literary journey to survey the monastic libraries of England, often shook from the unknown author a whole century of dust and cobwebs. When libraries became one source of the pleasures of life, the lovers of books appear to have been curious in selecting their site, for perfect seclusion and silence amid their noble residences, and also in their contrivances to arrange their volumes, so as to have them at instant command. One of these Gothic libraries, in an old castle belonging to the Percys, has been described by Leland with congenial delight. I shall transcribe his words, accommodating the reader with our modern orthography.

"One thing I liked extremely in one of the towers; that was a STUDY called PARADISE; where was a closet in the middle of eight squares latticed 'abrate;' and at the top of every square was a desk ledged to set books on, on coffers within them, and these seemed as joined hard to the top of the closet; and yet by pulling, one or all would come down breast-high in rabbets (or grooves), and serve for desks to lay books on."

However clumsy this invention in "Paradise" may seem to us, it was not more so than the custom of chaining their books to the shelves, allowing a sufficient length of chain to reach the reading-desk—a mode which long prevailed when printing multiplied the cares of the librarian.

All these libraries, consisting of manuscripts, were necessarily limited in their numbers; their collectors had no choice, but gladly received what occurred to their hands; it was when books were multiplied by the press, that the minds of owners of libraries shaped them to their own fancies, and stamped their characters on these companions of their solitude.

We have a catalogue of the library of Mary Queen of Scots, as delivered up to her son James the Sixth, in 1578 *, very characteristic of her elegant studies; the volumes chiefly consist of French authors and French

* Dibdin's Bibliographical Decameron, iii. 245.

translations, a variety of chronicles, several romances, a few Italian writers, Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Ariosto, and her favourite poets, Alain Chartier, Ronsard, and Marot. This library forms a striking contrast with that of Elizabeth of England, which was visited in 1598, by Hentzner, the German traveller. The shelves at Whitehall displayed a more classical array; the collection consisted of Greek, Latin, as well as Italian and French books.

The dearness of parchment, and the slowness of the scribes, made manuscripts things only purchasable by princely munificence. It was the discovery of paper from rags, and the novel art of taking copies without penmen, which made books mere objects of commerce, and dispersed the treasures of the human mind free as air, and cheap as bread.

HENRY THE SEVENTH.

THERE was a state of transition in our literature, both classical and vernacular, which deserves our notice in the progress of the genius of the nation.

A prudent sovereign in the seventh Henry, amid factions rather joined together than cemented, gave a semblance of repose to a turbulent land, exhausted by its convulsions. A martial rudeness still lingered among the great; and we discover by a curious conversation which the learned Pace held with some of the gentry, with whom, perhaps, he had indiscreetly remonstrated, attempting to impress on their minds the advantages of study, that his advice was indignantly rejected. Such pursuits seemed to them unmanly, and intolerable impediments in the practice of those more active arts of life which alone were worthy of one of gentle blood; their fathers had been good knights without this idling toil of reading.

Henry the Seventh, when Earl of Richmond, during his exile in France from 1471 to 1485, had become a reader of French romances, an admirer of French players, and an amateur of their peculiar architecture. After his accession we trace these new tastes in our

poetry, our drama, and in a novel species of architecture which Bishop Fox called Burgundian, and which is the origin of the Tudor style*. A favourer of the histrionic art, he introduced a troop of French players. Wary in his pleasures as in his politics, this monarch was moderate in his patronage either of poets or players, but he was careful to encourage both. The queen participated in his tastes, and appears to have bestowed particular rewards on "players," whose performances had afforded her unusual delight; and among the curious items of her majesty's expenditure, we find that many of these players were foreigners — "a French player, an Italian poet, a Spanish tumbler, a Flemish tumbler, a Welshman for making a ryme, a maid that came out of Spain and danced before the queen."

This monarch had suffered one of those royal marriages which are a tribute paid to the interests of the state. Henry had yielded with repugnance to a union with Elizabeth the Yorkist; the sullen Lancastrian long looked on his queen with the eyes of a factionist. Toward the latter years of his life this repugnance seems to have passed away, as this gentle consort largely participated in his tastes. It was probably in their sympathy that the personal prejudices of Henry

* Speed's History, 995.

melted away. This indeed was a triumph of the arts of imagination over the warped feelings of the individual; it marked the transition from barbaric arms to the amenities of literature, and the softening influence of the mimetic arts; it was the presage of the magnificence of his successor. The nation was benefited by these new tastes; the pacific reign made a revolution in our court, our manners, and our literature.

We may date from this period that happy intercourse which the learned English opened with the Continent, and more particularly with literary Italy; our learned travellers now appear in number. Colet, the founder of St. Paul's School, not only passed over to Paris, but lingered in Italy, and returned home with the enthusiasm of classical antiquity. Grocyn, to acquire the true pronunciation of the Greek, which he first taught at Oxford, domesticated with Demetrius Chalcondyles and Angelo Politian, at Florence. Linacre, the projector of the College of Physicians, visited Rome and Florence. Lilly the grammarian we find at Rhodes and at Rome, and the learned Pace at Padua. We were thus early great literary travellers; and the happier Continentalists, who rarely move from their native homes, have often wondered at the restless condition of those whom they have sometimes reproached as being *Insulaires*; yet

they may be reminded that we have done no more than the most ancient philosophers of antiquity. Our reproachers fortunately possessed the arts, and even the learning, which we were willing by travel and costs to acquire. "The Islanders" may have combined all the knowledge of all the world, a freedom and enlargement of the mind, which those, however more fortunately placed, can rarely possess, who restrict their locality, and narrow their comprehension by their own home-bound limits.

The king, delighting in poetry, fostered an English muse in the learned rhyme of STEPHEN HAWES, who was admitted to his private chamber, for the pleasure which Henry experienced in listening to poetic recitation. It was probably the taste of his royal master which inspired this bard's allegorical romance of chivalry, of love, and of science. This elaborate work is "The Pastime of Pleasure, or the History of Graunde Amour and la bel Pucel, containing the knowledge of the seven sciences and the course of man's life." At a time when sciences had no reality, they were constantly alluding to them; ignorance hardily imposed its erudition; and experimental philosophy only terminated in necromancy. The seven sciences of the accomplished gentleman were those so well known, comprised in the scholastic distich.

In the ideal hero "Graunde Amour," is shadowed forth the education of a complete gentleman of that day. From the Tower of "Doctrine," to the Castle of "Chivalry," the way lies equally open, but the progress is diversified by many bye-paths, and a number of personified ideas or allegorical characters. These shadowy actors lead to shadowy places; but the abounding incidents relieve us among this troop of passionless creatures.

This fiction blends allegory with romance, and science with chivalry. At the early period of printing, it was probably the first volume which called in the graver's art to heighten the inventions of the writer, and the accompanying wood-cuts are an evidence of the elegant taste of the author, although that morose critic of all poesy, honest Anthony à Wood, sarcastically concludes that these cuts were "to enable the reader to understand the story better." This once courtly volume, our sage reports, "is now thought but worthy of a ballad-monger's stall*." "The Pastime of Plea-

* This forlorn volume of Anthony's "Stalls" is now a gem placed in the caskets of black-letter. This poetic romance, by its excessive rarity,—the British Museum is without a copy,—has obtained most extraordinary prices among our collectors. A copy of the first edition at the Roxburgh sale reached 84*l.*, which was sold at Sir M. M. Sykes' for half the price; later editions, for a fourth. A copy was sold at Heber's sale for 25*l.* It may, however, relieve the distress of some curious readers to be informed that

sure" was even despised by that great book-collector, General Lord Fairfax, who, on the copy he possessed, has left a memorandum that "it should be changed for a better book!" The fate of books vacillates with the fancies of book-lovers, and the improvements of a later age. In the days of Fairfax, the gloom of the civil wars annihilated their imaginations.

But the gorgeousness of this romance struck the Gothic fancy of the historian of our poetry, magic, chivalry, and allegory! In the circumstantial analysis of Warton, the reader may pursue his "course of man's life" through the windings of the labyrinth. It seems as if the patience of the critic had sought a relief amid his prolonged chronicle of obscure versifiers, in a production of imagination, the only one which had appeared since Chaucer, and which, to the contemplative poetic antiquary, showed him the infant rudiments of the future Spenser.

This allegorical romance is imbued with Provençal fancy, and probably emulated the "Roman de la Rose," which could not fail to be a favourite with the royal

it may now be obtained at the most ordinary cost of books. Mr. SOUTHEY, with excellent judgment, has preserved the romance in his valuable volume of "Specimens of our Ancient Poets," from the time of Chaucer; it is to be regretted, however, that the text is not correctly printed, and that the poem has suffered mutilation—six thousand lines seem to have exhausted the patience of the modern typographer.

patron, among those French books which he loved. Fertile in invention, it is however of the old stock; fresh meads and delicious gardens,—ladies in arbours,—magical trials of armed knights on horses of steel, which, touched by a secret spring, could represent a tourney. We strike the shield at the castle-gate of chivalry, and we view the golden roof of the hall, lighted up by a carbuncle of prodigious size; we repose in chambers, walled with silver, and enamelling many a story. There are many noble conceptions among the allegorical gentry. She, whom Graunde Amour first beheld was mounted on her palfrey, flying with the wind, encircled with tongues of fire, and her two milk-white greyhounds, on whose golden collars are inscribed in diamond letters, *Grace* and *Governance*. She is Fame, her palfrey is Pegasus, and her burning tongues are the voice of Posterity! There are some grotesque incidents, as in other romances; a monster wildly created, the offspring of Disdain and Strangeness—a demon composed of the seven metals! We have also a dwarf who has to encounter a giant with seven heads; our subdolous David mounts on twelve steps cut in the rock; and to the surprise of the giant, he discovered in "the boy whom he had mocked," his equal in stature, and his vanquisher, notwithstanding the inconceivable roar of his seven heads!

Warton transcribed a few lines to show this poet's "harmonious versification and clear expression;" but this short specimen may convey an erroneous notion. Our verse was yet irregular, and its modulation was accidental rather than settled; the metrical lines of Hawes, for the greater part, must be read rhythmically, it was a barbarism that even later poets still retained. He also affected an ornate diction; and Latin and French terms cast an air of pedantry, more particularly when the euphony of his verse is marred by closing his lines with his elongated polysyllables; he probably imagined that the dimensions of his words necessarily lent a grandeur to his thoughts. With all these defects, Hawes often surpasses himself, and we may be surprised, that in a poem composed in the court of Henry the Seventh, about 1506, the poet should have left us such a minutely-finished picture of female beauty, as he has given of La Pucelle; Hawes had been in Italy, and seems with an artist's eye to have dwelt on some picture of Raphael, in his early manner, or of his master Perugino, in his hard but elaborate style.

"Her shining hair, so properly she dresses,
Aloft her forehead, with fayre golden tresses;
Her forehead stepe, with fayre browés ybent;
Her eyen gray; her nosé straight and fayre;
In her white cheeks, the faire bloudé it went

As among the white, the reddé to repayre;
Her mouthe right small; her breathe sweet of ayre;
Her lippes soft and ruddy as a rose;
No hart alive but it would him appose.
With a little pitte in her well-favoured chynne;
Her necke long, as white as any lillye,
With vaynés blewe, in which the bloude ranne in;
Her pappés rounde, and thereto right pretýe;
Her armés slender, and of goodly bodýe;
Her fingers small, and thereto right long,
White as the milk, with blewé vaynes among;
Her feet propér; she gartred well her hose;
I never sawe so fayre a créatúre."

The reign of Henry the Seventh was a misty morning of our vernacular literature, but it was the sunrise; and though the road be rough, we discover a few names by which we may begin to count,—as we find on our way a mile-stone, which, however rudely cut and worn out, serves to measure our distances.

END OF VOL. I.

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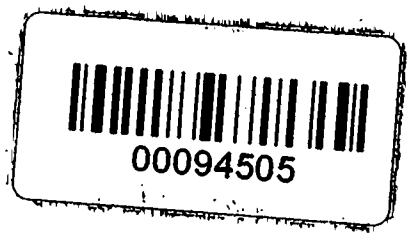
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